

June 2026



Ethnic Studies Educator Support



JOIN OUR
EDUCATOR
BULLETIN

*Some parts
of the past
are difficult
to recover.*

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KNOW
WHERE YOU ARE FROM?
WHAT HAS BEEN LOST?
WHAT HAS BEEN FOUND?

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

Juneteenth, *Loving v. Virginia*, Pride, Caribbean American, and National Immigrant Heritage Months

This issue explores the many ways people adapt, reclaim connection, and preserve memory when parts of the past are lost or fragmented; **how people navigate rupture, carry memory forward, and search for belonging.**

Rupture is what happens when people become separated from places, traditions, communities, languages, or versions of themselves that felt like home. While the forces that shape rupture often happen “on the outside” — migration, displacement, war, assimilation, language loss, family change, politics, natural disaster, or evolving identities — rupture is lived and felt, too. Across generations, people carry the past forward in different ways — preserving some traditions, reshaping others, and rediscovering parts of their inheritance that may have been lost.

This issue includes dozens of classroom-ready resources for grades 6-12, including films, podcasts, oral histories, museum collections, primary sources, poetry, music, lesson plans, and interdisciplinary learning activities. **Educators will find opportunities to teach legal precedent, family history, artistic interpretation, visual literacy, cultural inheritance, identity, memory, and historical inquiry through student-centered, humanizing pedagogy.**

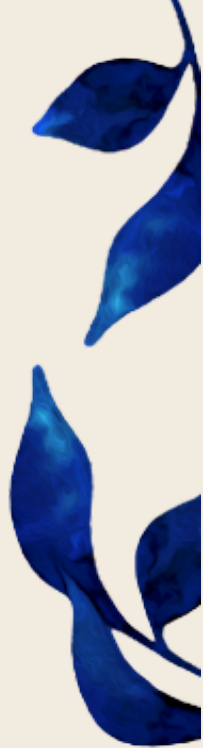


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JUNETEENTH

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“What to the slave is the Fourth of July?” (Frederick Douglass). This section spotlights 25 African American historic sites through the National Park Service’s “**Twenty & Odd**” educational video and companion activities, which incorporate **Maya Angelou’s** poem, “**And Still I Rise.**” *Classroom connections* include an expert interview, documentary footage, five songs – including **Beyoncé’s** rendition of the Black National Anthem, “**Lift Every Voice and Sing**” – and three books for educators, including a memoir by Rebecca Walker, daughter of the author behind *The Color Purple*.

LOVING V. VIRGINIA (1967)

PAGE 6

This section identifies intersections of the **1967** Supreme Court case that helped **dismantle Jim Crow race laws** and set a precedent for the **2015** ruling in favor of **gay marriage**. *Classroom connections* include a film, an opera, first-person interviews, and television clips accompanied by dozens of classroom-ready activities, including: “Teaching Civil Rights and Legal History with Black American Opera,” “Teaching US Government and Civil Rights History with Law and Legal Precedent,” and an “I Am From” project inspired by the guest editorial: “Melungeon Memories.”

PRIDE MONTH

PAGE 21

From **Marsha P. Robinson** and the legacy of Black trans women at **Stonewall**, to **Bayard Rustin** – an openly gay black man who advised Rev. Dr. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** and played a pivotal role in organizing the **1963 March on Washington** – these instructional materials *restore the story*. *Classroom connections* include a film, a podcast, and a digital photography collection that guide students to explore and identify artistic storytelling, search curated museums exhibits, and interpret meaning.

CARIBBEAN AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

PAGE 25

This section explores the roots of a relationship between **Haiti** and the **Dominican Republic** shaped by revolution, colonialism, and competing visions of freedom. The instructional materials clarify how **Vodou/Voodoo** is an outgrowth of survival and define **creole** as *language, culture, and ethnicity*, including the Ethnic Studies concept of “**creolization**.” *Classroom Connections* include an innovative, original lesson plan that invites students to conduct historical research, develop representative characters, and narrate responsibly from those perspectives. It also includes: A memoir about Antigua, a YA novel at the intersections of Pride and Caribbean American Heritage Months, two documentaries, a podcast, a Mardi Gras digital exhibition with classroom-ready activities, and recommended readings for educators.

NATIONAL IMMIGRANT HERITAGE MONTH

PAGE 36

This section centers the rediscovery of a lost culture. A testimony to destruction as much as a celebration of inheritance, this section reflects on immigration, widespread assimilation, and an effort to find continuity after rupture. It offers a story about reviving an ancestral language (Yiddish) and, in the process, reclaiming and learning an inherited but dismembered language. *Classroom connections* include one film, two documentaries, supplemental readings, and an original activity that connects Ethnic Studies concepts of **epistemology** (*ways of knowing*), **positionality** (*ways of seeing and perceiving*), and **standpoint reasoning** (*ways of interpreting*).

CONCLUSION

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CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum state-approved lesson plans.

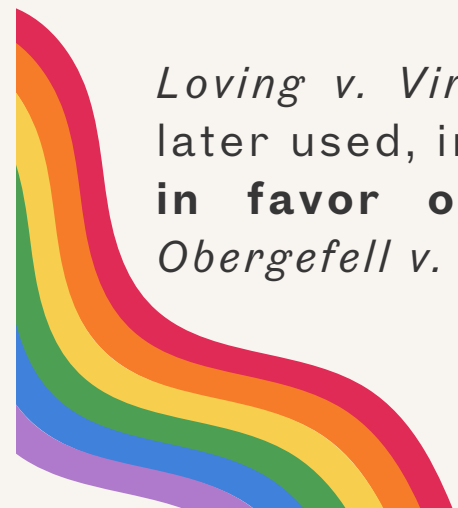


DECISIONS SHAPE A NATION

Legal Precedent in *Loving v. Virginia* and PRIDE

Loving v. Virginia (1967) was a Supreme Court case and ruling that is widely considered the beginning of the full dismantling of **Jim Crow race laws** in the United States. The ruling banned anti-miscegenation laws (intermarriage between white people and non-white groups) in the United States.

About the Plaintiffs: Mildred was a Black and Indigenous/Native American woman. She and Richard - a white man - were childhood friends and sweethearts. They married in DC, where interracial marriage was legal. Shortly after returning to Caroline County, Virginia, to live as husband and wife, the county Sheriff arrested them in their home.



Loving v. Virginia set a **legal precedent** that was later used, in 2015, when the Supreme Court ruled **in favor of same-sex marriage** in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

Juneteenth

IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION



*“I think **Juneteenth should be an umbrella celebration for all of the emancipations.** Emancipation was **not just one day**, not just one moment; it took place over a period of time - the enslaved people emancipated themselves, the Army emancipated a number of people as well. I think Juneteenth can be used to think about those moments of emancipation. **Juneteenth didn’t end slavery in the United States - it was the end of the military effort to maintain slavery.**”*

READ

*Annette Gordon-Reed, author of *On Juneteenth*
[LISTEN AND WATCH](#) her “Expert Interview”

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Discover

“Twenty & Odd”
Historic Landmarks

“

Through the lens of our nation’s most storied lands and some of the iconic places preserved,” the National Park Service (NPS) staff write, “Twenty & Odd builds on the innumerable contributions of African Americans to the foundation of the United States.” This video is “set against 400 years of suffering, healing, and strength, the film explores the trauma, resilience, and beauty of the African American experience in our country.” NPS creators describe the project as “developed by a group of ... staff and interns — **mostly young African American women.**”

The film includes narration and inspiration from **Dr. Maya Angelou’s, “And Still I Rise,”** and the companion integrates this poem into the learning about the video.

*Explore*

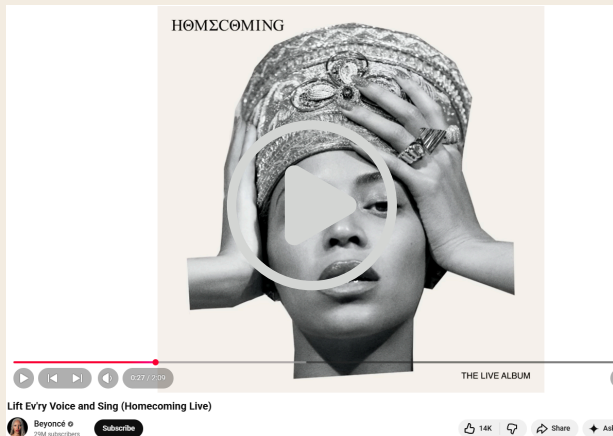
- [COMPANION](#) Activity
- [Places of Struggle, Community and Triumph](#)
- [Parks and Places in "Twenty & Odd"](#) includes 25 locations and historic sites across the country – from New York to Alabama
- [Beyond Beautiful Places](#)

Learn More

- [A Nation's Story: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”](#) National Museum of African American History and Culture
- Watch [Descendants Read Frederick Douglass' Speech](#)
- [What is Juneteenth?](#) National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth](#) National Museum of African American History and Culture

Discover

WATCH AND LISTEN

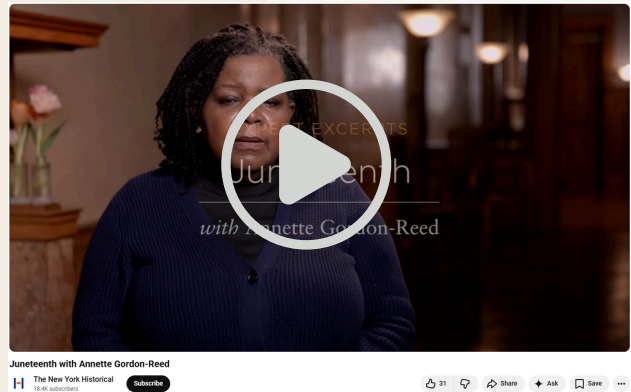


Lift Every Voice and Sing

Appropriate songs for Juneteenth:

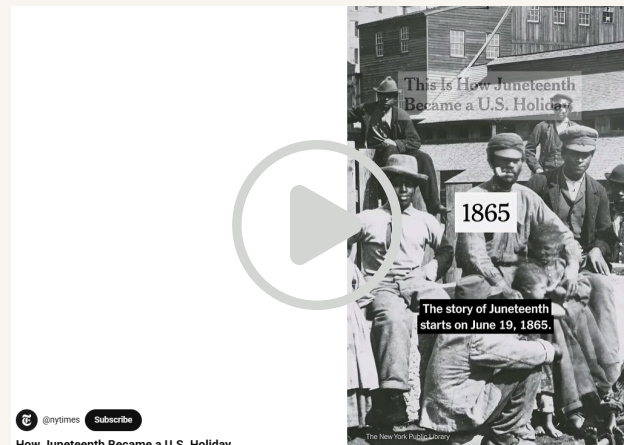
- "Freedom Is Coming"
- "O, Freedom"
- "Siyahamba"
- "Goodness Is Stronger than Evil"
- "We Shall Overcome"
- "Lift Every Voice and Sing"

Learn about the "[Black American National Anthem](#)" (NAACP)



Expert Interview

Annette Gordon-Reed, author of *On Juneteenth* (2021) reflects on history, culture, and meaning.

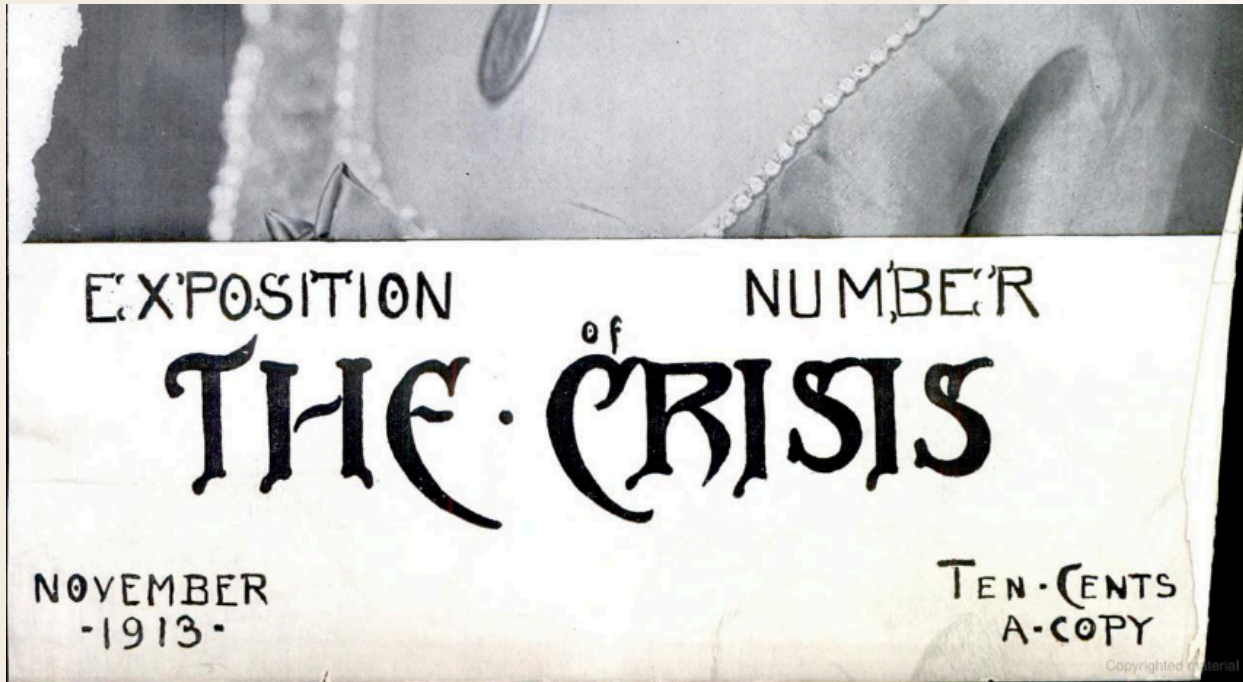


Documentary Footage

Brief reel (1:24) on the history of Juneteenth by *The New York Times* with archival images and historical background.

Discover

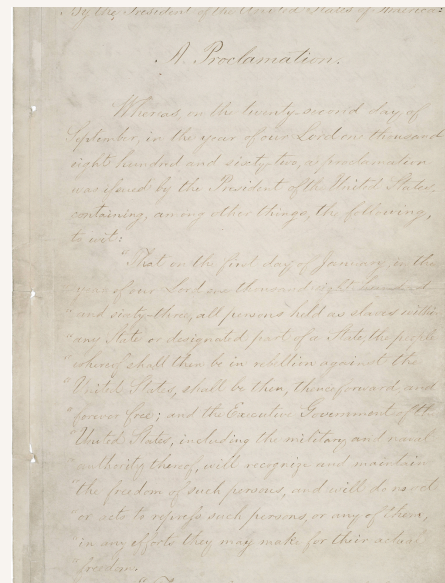
PRIMARY SOURCES



The Crisis

A historic magazine founded by W. E. B. Du Bois as the official publication of the NAACP. This issue was published in November 1913, is 48 pages long, and was produced by The Crisis Publishing Company. [Access here.](#)

Emancipation Proclamation



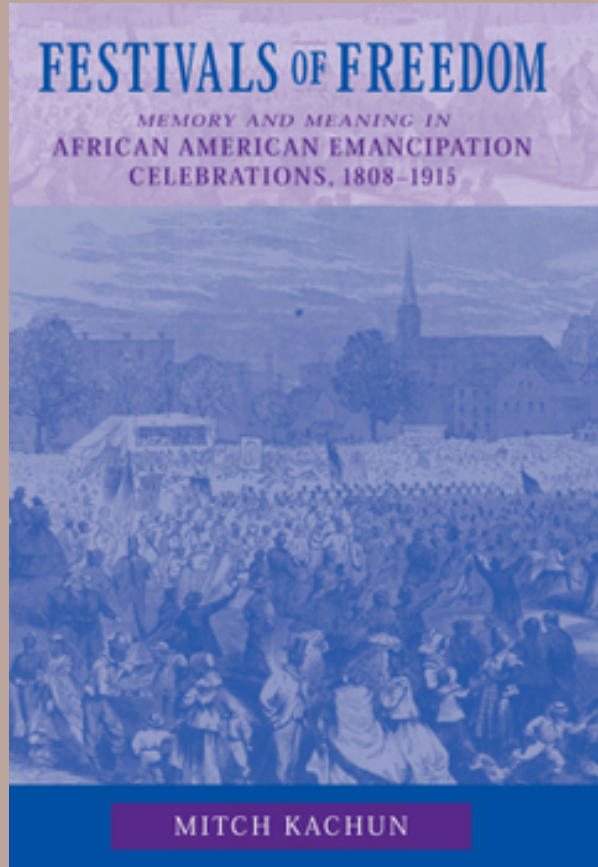
TRANSCRIPT OF THE PROCLAMATION

Or, see the [Archival Version](#)

Record of the United States.
Retrieved from the National Archives.

READING RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Rather than presenting emancipation as a fixed historical event, Mitch Kachun shows how **African Americans used public celebrations, oratory, and the Black press over more than a century to negotiate questions of citizenship, leadership, memory, and collective identity.** Educators will find this book especially valuable for highlighting Black agency and demonstrating how communities themselves have long been engaged in defining, contesting, and reclaiming the meaning of freedom.

Loving v. Virginia

The Landmark Supreme Court Ruling

IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION



Americans born in the 21st century will shake their heads in disbelief on learning that 40 states once had laws prohibiting interracial marriage.

The Supreme Court struck down the last of these statutes in the 1967 case of Mildred and Richard Loving, a black woman and a white man who were arrested and banished from Virginia for the crime of being married.

The couple became celebrities after the landmark ruling known as Loving v. Virginia. But Mildred and Richard wanted nothing to do with fame. They returned to the tiny, [remote] community of Central Point, in Caroline County, Va., and shunned publicity ... Mildred ... maintained all along that they married because they were in love, not to fight a civil rights battle.”

-Brent Staples, New York Times (2008)

Discover

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS



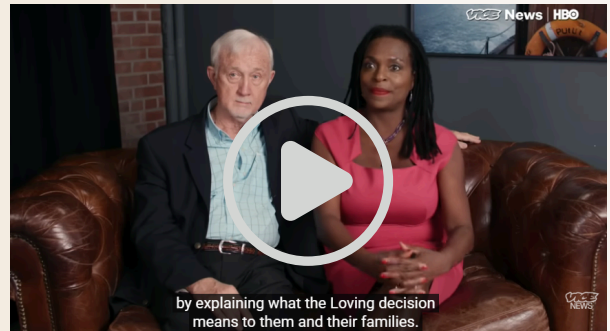
Black Opera & Arts Criticism

"It's kind of like a Romeo and Juliet type of situation, except the Montagues and Capulets are the U.S. government" ([Trailer](#)). Studying this production by composer Damien Geter and librettist Jessica Murphey Moo – commissioned the Virginia Opera and Richmond Symphony – helps students consider how law shapes lived experience and how artists transform historical events into compelling and intentional stories about home, suffering, and belonging. Explore the ESResources companion on pages 9-11.



Dramatic Film (2016)

Loving (2016, PG-13) follows Mildred and Richard Loving, the plaintiffs of the 1967 Supreme Court case. The biographical romantic drama that tells their story: a working-class interracial couple arrested in 1958 for violating Virginia's anti-miscegenation laws, which sparked a historic legal battle.



Testimony & Lived Experience

These testimonial interviews with interracial couples in the U.S. 50 years post-*Loving v. Virginia* reflect on past political progress and cultural transformations still to come. This video is bound to foster engaged and generative conversation that many students are likely to find personally resonant.



Legal Precedent & SCOTUS

From the 27-time Emmy Award-winning series, *The West Wing*, this clip explores a nomination to the Supreme Court, the concept of "originalism," and how "precedent" factors into U.S. federal law. The ESResources companion on p.12 includes links to more than a dozen complete lesson plans, including primary source texts, videos, and oral arguments, and multiple stand-alone classroom activities.

LOVING V. VIRGINIA OPERA

Teaching Civil Rights and Legal History With Black American Theater

“

*“The opera starts with a bluegrass movement ... to give a sense of place ... The whole point of the opera is the fact that **this couple wanted to get back home**. As the composer, I need to figure **what this notion of ‘home’ is** – so there is a *home theme* that goes all through the opera ...*

*There’s also a *trouble theme*, which is simply morse code - **anytime a sheriff enters or the judge enters you hear this trouble theme** ... and the way they then sing is this very sort of straight, lack of emotion, almost robotic ...*

*Sometimes you hear the *home theme* and the *trouble theme* and the *law theme* coming together, which **means something that involves the law that is keeping them from being able to go home.**“*

-Damien Geter, acclaimed American composer



[View Bio](#)

OPERA: MELODIES AS MEMORY

Teaching Belonging and Artistic Interpretation for *Loving v. Virginia*

Composer Damien Geter describes using **recurring musical themes to represent ideas such as home, trouble, and fear** throughout the opera, *Loving v. Virginia*. Combined with production clips and arts journalism, these resources invite students to explore how artists communicate memory, belonging, rupture, and justice through creative expression. The review, “[Virginia is for Lovers](#),” further supports classroom learning by helping students understand opera as a multidisciplinary art form that combines music, theater, design, history, and storytelling. It also models arts journalism and evidence-based criticism. You might also consider referencing an [interview](#) with Damien Geter, or another one of his works, such as “[THE TALK: Instructions for Black Children When They Interact With The Police](#).”

Discussion Questions

- What historical events are portrayed in the opera?
- What artistic choices were made, by whom, and for what purpose?
- How does the reviewer support opinions with evidence?
- How does music help tell a story?
- How does the creator communicate themes of home, separation, and belonging?
- After reading the review, what aspects of the opera would you pay closest attention to while watching it?

Student Analysis Topics

- Analyze how historical events are adapted into artistic works.
- Compare a creator's stated intentions with a critic's interpretation.
- Examine how music, staging, costumes, lighting, and performance contribute to storytelling and meaning.
- Identify recurring artistic devices and evaluate how they communicate themes such as home, conflict, belonging, and justice.



MELODIES AS MEMORY

LOVING V. VIRGINIA OPERA

Teaching Belonging and Artistic Interpretation

Student Activities

Design for Meaning: Create a set design, costume concept, poster, or exhibit that communicates a theme such as belonging, exclusion, migration, memory, identity, or resilience.

Arts Journalism Project: Attend, watch, read, or experience a work of art and write an evidence-based review that evaluates how effectively artistic choices communicate meaning.

What Represents Home? Create a playlist, soundscape, collage, poem, artwork, or multimedia piece that represents a place, community, language, tradition, or memory associated with "home." Explain the artistic choices made.

Close Reading & Annotation: Analyze the review as a piece of arts journalism. Identify descriptive statements, interpretations, and evaluative judgments. Discuss how criticism shapes audience understanding of art. Compare Damien Geter's explanation of the opera with the reviewer's interpretation. Where do they agree? Where do they emphasize different aspects of the work?

Adapting History: Choose a historical event, family story, oral history, or community issue and adapt it into another artistic form (lyrics, score, play, graphic novel, zine, film, podcast, visual artwork, etc.). Explain the artistic decisions made and how they communicate meaning.

Home Across Texts: Identify examples in literature, history, music, or film where individuals seek, lose, leave, return to, or redefine home. Compare those experiences with themes explored in *Loving v. Virginia*.

Use Alongside SCOTUS Lesson Plans: After completing recommended lesson plans or activities on page 12, students create an artistic response (song, visual artwork, dramatic scene, poem, storyboard, or short video) that translates a legal principle or historical event into a creative form for a public audience.

LESSON PLANS

LEGAL PRECEDENT AND SCOTUS

Consult [Turning Supreme Court Cases into Powerful Classroom Learning](#) for guidance on student-centric, humanizing pedagogy when teaching U.S. law and legal decisions.

GENERAL SCOTUS

- [Practice with Precedents](#) National Constitution Center | Grades: 9-12, 60 min - Includes a “matching” activity between court cases and legal precedents.
- [The Power and Importance of Precedent in the Decisions of the Supreme Court](#) Grades: 9-12 | 135 min - Includes 10 student handouts / activities.
- [Interactions Between the Branches](#) Supreme Court Historical Society - Asks: “According to X, what is the job of the Supreme Court?” and students compare Article III of the Constitution, Federalist Paper #78, *Marbury v. Madison*, and FDR’s 1937 “Fireside Chat.”
- [Legal Precedent: From Griswold v. CN to Roe v. Wade to Same-Sex Marriage](#) | C-SPAN - Includes 8 clips with extension activities.
- [SCOTUS “Tournament” / Bracketology AP Gov Cases](#) - Includes 14 lesson plans, dozens of videos, and is adaptable to be completed as a class or independently in person, hybrid, or through distance learning.
- [“On This Day in History”](#) C-SPAN ongoing resource database

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

INTERRACIAL

- [“*Loving v. Virginia* \(1967\) The Supreme Court decision upholding equal protection and due process in regard to interracial marriage”](#) with background, definitions, and historical questions | Supreme Court Historical Society
- [“Practice SCOTUS FRQ - *Loving v. Virginia*”](#) | C-SPAN
- [“Video Clip: *Loving v. Virginia*”](#) | C-SPAN

PRIMARY SOURCES

- “Did Virginia’s antimiscegenation law violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment?” | Oral Argument April 10, 1967 | [LISTEN \(2:16:26\)](#)
- “Excerpt: Majority Opinion, Chief Justice Earl Warren” | [READ](#)

LGBTQI+

- [“History of marriage arguments in *Obergefell v. Hodges*”](#) (3 clips) | C-SPAN
 - [“On This Day: Obergefell v Hodges Decided”](#) (2 clips) | C-SPAN
 - [“On This Day in History Handout”](#) | C-SPAN
-

QUESTIONING IS THE ACT OF WEAVING

Guest Editorial by Stacey Aviva Clark

Public speaker. Community educator. Urban planner. Faculty lecturer. Philanthropist.



“

My children are a blend of seven nationalities.

I was always the youngest and, as the brownest, I was affectionately called, “brownsugar.” You see, Great Granny was quite fair and never really referred to herself as a race, other than her **Cherokee** heritage. My cousins were white, Black, and mixed. I loved seeing my cousins, who had dark skin and green eyes!

I thought this was everyone’s family makeup ...

I am writing this story because I am the inheritor of a fantastic legacy – a tribute to my family. Our legacy can be traced back to the **1700s in colonial Virginia**. It can be traced back to the **1600s, in Europe**; to the **Eastern Band of Cherokee, pre-colonial contact**, where we once lived in the region of modern-day Kentucky and its surrounding areas. And our fantastic family legacy can be traced back, of course, to **Africans (enslaved and free)**.

When digital records emerged, I typed fragmented facts and recollections passed down from my great-grandmother, and *a whole new world opened to me* – and to my family.

READ THE FULL PIECE ON PAGE 13

NORTHERN STAR NEVER FORGET

A Poem by Stacey Aviva Clark

No one ever taught me to mourn for my ancestors lost in the Atlantic waters during the slave trade, or the countless killed just because they would not submit to degradation because of their skin color, those lynched or killed for learning to read, or refusing the Christian religion.

Our symbol of hope was the Northern Star, sewn onto quilts to guide escaping slaves north, following the stars in the sky to freedom.

I am linked in heart and spirit to every Jew who has ever been killed because they refused to conform or just for being Jewish in ancestry, regardless of observance. Our symbol is the *Magen David*. Once we were forced to wear it as a symbol of shame, now it is a symbol of resistance and boldness, *Am Israel Chai*. *

Jews have always blended their heritage with the unique lands and peoples where we have interacted, and today I proudly do the same.

I am healing as I mourn my people from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, and the fields of Virginia/KY/Mississippi, to the soils of the lands of the Inquisition, to the concentration camps.

I am brown Northern Star, born on the Ohio River, aka the Jordan River.

I am the Star of David, a Jewess through and through.

I am all of my people, and I will never forget...



Classroom Connections

Grades: 6-12

Directions: Students create an **“I Am From” poem**. Inspired by the guest editorial on the following pages, called “Melungeon Memoires,” and the poem, “Northern Star Never Forget,” invite students to trace the people, places, stories, objects, languages, foods, traditions, and journeys that shape their own identities. Encourage students to explore both remembered and recovered histories, considering how family stories, cultural practices, migration, inheritance, belonging, and agency *continue to influence who they are today*. Students may draw on oral histories, family interviews, photographs, or community and personal memories to deepen their reflections. *Conclude with a sharing circle, spoken word performance, peer-group discussions, or “rationale” jigsaw presentations.*

Student Poem TEMPLATES
For Beginners or For Intermediate

DOWNLOAD



MELUNGEON MEMORIES



By Stacey Aviva Clark

Melungeon's are a tri-racial ethnic group formed by early Americans located in Appalachia composed of Black, white and Indigenous citizens. As strict racial laws were codified, many fled into the mountains to escape persecution. Some, however, chose to blend completely into white or Black communities. To learn more, see the [Melungeon Heritage Association](#).

Honoring the Past to Build a Future

I am writing this story because I am the inheritor of a fantastic family legacy. This story (probably the first installment) is a tribute to my family. Our fantastic legacy can be traced back to the 1700s in colonial Virginia. It can be traced back to the 1600s, in Europe; to the Eastern Band of Cherokee, pre-colonial contact, where we once lived in the region of modern-day Kentucky and its surrounding areas; and our fantastic family legacy can be traced back, of course, to Africans (enslaved and free).

I write this to begin documenting and honoring the most important people in my life who raised me and have sadly all passed. From these simple people, I learned about the importance of family and the value of not letting anything divide it. Great Granny eventually moved to Ohio to live with my grandma, near her son and my aunt, where she lived to be 105. I was sixteen when she died. My aunt passed in 2023, and my grandma passed this past June at age 97.

I was always the youngest and, as the brownest, I was affectionately called, “brown sugar.” You see, Great Granny was quite fair and never really referred to herself as a race, other than her Cherokee heritage. My cousins were white, Black, and mixed. I loved seeing my cousins, who had dark skin and green eyes! I thought this was everyone’s family makeup.

Race or color, man-made laws, or state boundaries never separated us. I took this for granted as a child, and at times, I was quite naive about race relations because of how I had grown up and idealized what I saw of my family. I now know that there were internal fights over race and name-calling, betrayals, and much trauma that racism had on our family.

I was once ashamed of the heavy drawls, bare feet, and strange food, but now **I am grateful that I carry the stories, recipes, and memories of a unique American family with a proudly Black, white, and Cherokee heritage... a unique American ethnicity known as Melungeon.**

But let me tell you about my great-grandma, Laura B.

An Appalachia-unique history: Afralachians-Melungeons

Melungeon Matriarch

My earliest childhood memories are of being loaded into the red Buick Electra 225 (aka Duce and a Quarterto) to drive from Cincinnati, Ohio to Millersburg, Kentucky to visit my great-grandma: “Granny,” “Granny Laura,” “Old Lady,” or **Laura B.** Visiting family in Millersburg was like stepping back in time. Granny’s house held objects you can only find at rural flea markets now: ice picks, a pot-belly stove, and feather tick beds (not a good idea when the “facilities” are behind the house in a small town lit up only by the stars). She lived on 12th street, a dirt road that deadened into railroad tracks. The real saving grace was next door, at my cousin’s fancy double-wide trailer, because she had indoor plumbing.

Our arrival always evoked the feeling of Thanksgiving. Every kind of homemade food imaginable would be on the table, including my favorites: the starches — homemade buttermilk biscuits, hot water cornbread, and, of course, salt-rising bread (stinky Appalachian bread!).

Back in Ohio, I was teased about how I spoke. Classmates accused me of having a nose job because, apparently, mine was not broad. I was ridiculed when my “white” aunt came to school functions as my family member when my grandma, Emma, couldn’t attend. Kentucky always felt different.

The Stories We Inherit: Police Chase

When anti-miscegenation laws still ruled Kentucky in the 1940’s, the police followed and arrested my family constantly, until my great-uncle and aunt eventually crossed the **Mason Dixon line**,* across the river, to a more tolerable Ohio.

But even across the river, the police crossed state lines – defending themselves on some bogus charges that my family now retells as a hilarious story about hiding in moving boxes.

My grandma Emma and my aunt Sylvia were best friends from childhood. Eventually, my aunt married her brother — my great-uncle. When the police found and arrested my aunt, my grandma exclaimed:



*If you’re
taking her,
you have to
take me too.*

So off to jail the two women went, the mixed multitude, where my grandma relays that between the two of them they made a raucous noise, launching and throwing spitballs. The exasperated police released them. That part of the situation, yeah, it’s hilarious. But anti-miscegenation laws were not hilarious. Hunting down people, chasing members of my family, forcing strategies for escape — that’s not hilarious.

Stories were also passed won to me as I sat at Laura B’s feet. Lots of times, there would be complete silence for long periods. But when she spoke, through pipe smoke. I was transported back to when the buffalo roamed past her house, to tales of her yodeling, blue-ribbon square dancing, and horse riding – side saddle, of course. It was my honor to light her corn-cob pipe. I would take the tobacco – which was sometimes fresh from my grandfather’s farm in Ripley, Ohio – crush it into the pipe, and then light and puff on it to get it going. Then, I passed the lit smoke to her.

Fluidity of Race and Status: Before One Drop

Before computers existed, my Great Granny told me she was born in Nicholasville, KY, to parents Jesse Henry Clay and Amanda Clay. Her father had lived in Mays Lick but was *born* in Virginia. When digital records emerged, I typed these fragmented facts into ancestry databses and the Kentucky Archives, and a whole new world opened to me — and to my family.

Interestingly enough, we are descendants of Senator Henry Clay, Muhammed Ali (originally born Clay), martial artist Jim Kelly, and Johnny Nash (song writer and publisher for Bob Marley).

In 1870, Jesse Henry was labeled as “**Mulatto**”* on the US Census. A decade later the census taker identified him as “Black.” Several of my uncles and aunts were listed as Mulatto into the 1900s, and I know of only one great-aunt who went on to pass for white, in Philadelphia.

I have since learned from **manumission*** documents (legal freedom declarations) that my great-great-great-grandmother, Amanda (Laura B’s mom), and Amanda’s mother, Phoebe Talbott/Smith, had been enslaved.

Phoebe was then bought by a Black man named Smith who later freed them. My cousin in Kentucky found records revealing my family had a history of purchasing slaves to free them, teaching them to farm to become self-sustaining as most freed slaves often ended up in situations not much different from enslavement. Many ended up as **sharecroppers** — who rent property to farm and end up owing the property owner due to the corrupt system that overcharged and cheated them.

My great-grandfather, however, was *not* a slave, nor was his mother: Abigail. In 1836, she was called to court to prove her freedom. The records from the courthouse state that Abigail produced sufficient evidence to prove that she, her daughter Jenny, and her son Jesse Henry (my great-grandfather) had all been born free.

Questions as a Bridge

Many people from mixed heritages are asked, *what are you?* For me, as a Jew who does not fit the typical **Ashkenazi*** phenotype, I am asked, *How are you Jewish?* While I have found no solid evidence for the claim, some say Melungeons are descendants of Portuguese Jews — who fled Inquisition-era persecution. Now, a question I often ask myself is: *how can I weave my Jewish heritage with my Melungeon heritage?*

The questions we ask and are asked about identity at their core inquire: *where do you belong?* And while inquiring most often does not come from a place of malice, learning how to ask questions respectfully is key. On the power of questions as bridges to relationship-building, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l emphasized that learning how to ask questions is foundational to bounding people together in community and through time and space.



*I am Melungeon.
I am Black.
I am Indigenous.
I am Jewish.*



*A replica of Laura B's pipe pictured with non-commercial, ritual-state, and Kentucky-grown tobacco Stacey Aviva Clark add to her **Havdalah besamim**.**

“

We are a unique mosaic of our intersecting identities. I am a unique mosaic of my intersecting identities.

As a Jew by Choice, I am inspired to weave my birth culture with my Jewishness. As Jews are a multiethnic, multiracial people. For me, tobacco was central to my people's lives in this country as a cash crop, medicinal, and ritual. I decided to add organic tobacco from Kentucky to my *besamim* (spices) for **Havdalah*** – to honor my birth and my chosen heritage. In this process, **In this way, I not only honor my ancestors, but I also model for my children how to continue weaving traditions.** Take a moment to ask yourself: How have you already woven in your origins and various identities?

GLOSSARY

Am Yisrael Chai: Translates from Biblical Hebrew to “The People of Israel Live.” It has served as a powerful rallying cry about peoplehood, shared ancestry and identity, solidarity, resilience, and continuity; today, it often affirms that despite centuries of persecution, hardship, and attempts at annihilation, the Jewish people continue to endure.

Havdalah: The Saturday evening Jewish ritual observed at the end of the weekly Sabbath. The ceremony includes multiple symbolic items, including the **besamim** – fragrant spices passed around for everyone to smell – which are meant to revive and invite joy, sweetness, and goodness for the upcoming workweek.

Mason Dixon Line: A historic boundary originally surveyed in the 1760s to resolve a border dispute, which later became famous as the cultural divide separating the free Northern states from the Southern states that upheld the system of slavery before and during the American Civil War.

Mulatto: The term Mulatto indicated mixed race people in the United States – often individuals who held both Black and white ancestry, with varying percentages. The “Mulatto” designation preserved as a racial classification on official records until shortly after 1920. The “**One Drop Rule**” then assigned individuals to a binary racial classification system, determining that ‘one drop’ of Black ancestry made someone Black, no matter their appearance or the diversity or multitude of ethnicities they inherited.

Sharecropping: An agricultural system where a farmer works someone else's land in exchange for a share of the crops, but the system often traps poor farmers in a cycle of endless debt.

Zt”l: A Jewish honorific abbreviation meaning, “May the memory of the righteous one be a blessing.” It is often used alongside the name of a respected, righteous, or scholarly deceased individual as a sign of deep respect. When reading a text aloud that contains this abbreviation, it is typically pronounced as “zatza.”



READING RECOMMENDATION

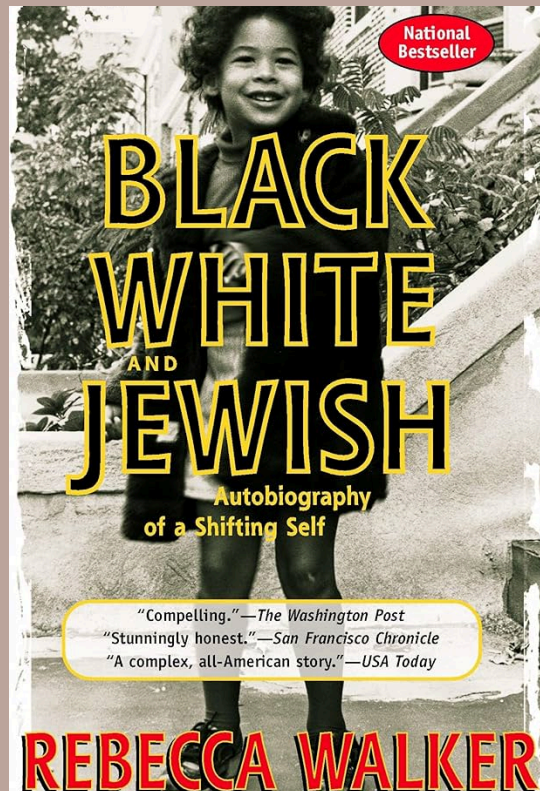
AGES 16+



Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Barbara Kingsolver that reimagines Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* in the contemporary Appalachian Mountains, following the life of a boy named Demon as he navigates poverty, foster care, and the opioid crisis in rural Virginia. Narrated in his own voice, the story explores themes of addiction, social injustice, and the **struggles of a marginalized community**, offering a powerful critique of the **failures of social systems through a compelling coming-of-age story**.

READING RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



This memoir is by Rebecca Walker – the daughter of famed **African American writer Alice Walker and liberal Jewish lawyer Mel Leventhal** (the first legally married interracial couple to live openly in Mississippi after the *Loving v. Virginia* decision). She describes the emotional pain of being **treated as a "symbol" of racial harmony instead of a real person**. When her parents divorced, she shuttled between her mother's Black literary circles and her father's Ashkenazi Jewish family. This memoir is renowned and worthy of lifelong learning for the beauty of creative writing, but not appropriate for high school students given its mature themes (e.g., sexuality, drug use, and adolescent pregnancy).

Pride Month

IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

Pride Month commemorates the histories, contributions, and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities. Pride provides an opportunity to explore how **advocacy, organizing, and everyday acts of courage** helped expand visibility, belonging, and civil rights. The resources in this section highlight figures whose contributions have not always received equal attention in popular historical narratives.

There is no single LGBTQ+ history, but Pride is closely associated with the historical event of the **Stonewall Riots** in 1969. Through photography, film, oral history, and museum collections, students can examine **how that history is remembered, whose stories are preserved, and how people can work through collective action to create social change**. The following materials support inquiry into identity, representation, civic participation, historical memory, and the many ways people leave lasting impacts on their communities – in fragments, through fissures, and as forces of change.

LEARN MORE

[*MARSHA JOHNSON, SYLVIA RIVERA, AND THE HISTORY OF PRIDE](#)

[*THE MOST RADICAL THING ABOUT STONEWALL WASN'T THE UPRISING](#)

Discover

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS



Marsha P. Johnson at a New York Gay Pride March, 1982. Photograph by Ron Simmons. Retrieved from the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#).

ACTIVITY

Students will choose one material from an online exhibition to observe closely. They will describe observations, search for spiritual, adaptive, and cultural symbols and images, and interpret meaning. This activity can be adapted to other online or in-person exhibits.

“

For me the reason to remember the Stonewall uprising is in recognition of the daily acts of courage the rioters took that got them to the bar that night. It is the multiple, unremarkable moments of inbreathing “Yo Soy, I am” that people on the margins take every day that is the watershed for change.

Katherine Ott

- Explore the [Dr. Ron Simmons Pride Photography Collection](#)
- [“Posing for LGBTQ+ History”](#) About Dr. Simmons

Discover

WATCH AND LISTEN

Bayard Rustin, advisor to Martin Luther King Jr., dedicated his life to the quest for racial equality, human rights and worldwide democracy.



Bayard Rustin and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Credit: Photo by Monroe Frederick, courtesy of the Estate of Bayard Rustin.

However, as an openly gay Black man, he has been forgotten in many stories told about the Civil Rights Movement he helped to build.

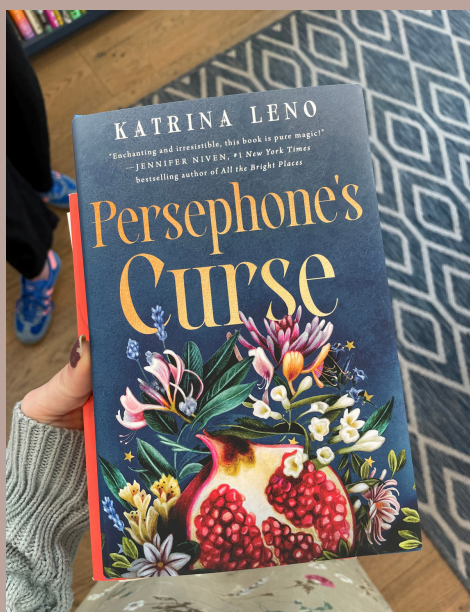


RUSTIN | Official Trailer | Netflix

Rustin (2023, PG-13) is a critically acclaimed film following civil rights and gay rights activist Bayard Rustin, who faces racism and homophobia as he helps change the course of Civil Rights history by orchestrating the 1963 March on Washington. The film spotlights the man who, alongside Martin Luther King Jr., dared to imagine a different world and inspired a movement. From director George C. Wolfe, the film features an all-star cast including Coleman Domingo, Chris Rock, Glynn Turman, Jeffrey Wright and Audra McDonald

LISTEN to the Podcast,
“Making Gay History”
(Season 4, ep. 8)





A young adult urban fantasy novel about four sisters in New York City. The story explores themes of sisterhood, grief, and love, blending Greek mythology and LGBTQ+ themes with a contemporary setting.



A magical realism novel with themes of sisterhood, healing from trauma, and LGBTQ+ identity through a suspenseful mystery set on an island.

YOUNG ADULT PRIDE NOVELS

From Zibby's Bookstore in Los Angeles, CA



PRIDE AT THE LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY

[Explore the Los Angeles Public Library's LGBTQIA Series](#)

Caribbean-American Heritage Month



IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

Caribbean American Heritage Month provides an opportunity to explore the **diverse histories, cultures, languages, and communities of the Caribbean and the Caribbean diasporas** that have taken root throughout the United States. The Caribbean is **not a single culture or experience**, but a region shaped by **Indigenous histories, African diasporas, European colonization, migration, resistance, cultural exchange, and ongoing processes of identity formation**. Today, Caribbean communities reflect a rich tapestry of languages, traditions, and historical experiences.

Caribbean American Heritage Month provides an opportunity to explore how Caribbean American people **preserve culture, memory, and belonging across generations** – inheriting and adapting forms of language, culture, identity, and community. For example, Haitian and Louisiana Vodou / Voodoo are distinct yet historically intertwined – born from the multiplicity of heritage, identity, ritual, and the Transatlantic Slave trade.

The resources in this section invite students to **examine how people make meaning from complex histories**. Through stories about survival and adaptation, Haiti and the Dominican Republic's intertwined histories, **Creole** language and culture, migration, **memoir**, and artistic expression, students can investigate **how communities carry the past forward while responding to change**. *These materials encourage inquiry into heritage, memory, identity, belonging, and the many ways cultures are preserved, transformed, and reimagined across generations.*

EXPLORE

*[NATIONAL ARCHIVES - CARIBBEAN AMERICAN HERITAGE](#)

*[WHERE AND WHAT IS THE CARIBBEAN?](#)

VODOU / VOODOO

To learn about the politics of spelling, read "[From Voodoo to Vodou](#)"



“Vodou .. simply put, was a way for enslaved Africans to survive during enslavement, such that they fused the Christian beliefs that were imposed upon them - by whomever was colonizing a territory - with beliefs that they brought with them from the African continent ... It's really not antithetical to believe in both. It's simply a different way, I think, of naming different beliefs or different sources of inspiration to understand one's world.”

Dr. Myriam J.A. Chancy

Discover

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Louisiana State Museums

Mystery in Motion: African American Spirituality in Mardi Gras

Explore the “[Mystery in Motion](#)” museum online exhibit and the “[Mystery in Motion](#)” professional development reading.

Activity

Students will choose one material from an online exhibition to observe closely. They will describe observations, search for spiritual, adaptive, and cultural symbols and images, and interpret meaning. This activity can be adapted to other online or in-person exhibits.



Voodoo Queen Kalindah Laveaux
Cheryl Gerber Photo, 2018

Kalindah Laveaux, shown here on Super Sunday, brings the spirit medicine of Voodoo to Black masking activities on Mardi Gras.

Creation of the World,
Witch Doctor Medicine Man
Photograph by Eric Waters, 2016

The Divine Prince Ty Emmecca, the Witch Doctor Medicine Man of the Yellow Pocahontas, wears a suit inspired by Mbombo, also called Bumba, the creator god among the Kuba people of Central Africa. Through vomiting, Mbombo generated everything. After forming land and water, he fashioned nine living beings: the leopard, eagle, crocodile, fish, tortoise, black leopard, white heron, scarab, and goat.

Discover

WATCH AND LISTEN

Podcast



Strictly Facts is a biweekly podcast that delves deep into the heart and soul of the Caribbean, celebrating its vibrant heritage, widespread diaspora, and the stories that shaped it. Created by a PhD student, Alexandria Miller, this podcast explores the rich tapestry of Caribbean stories told through the eyes of its people – historians, artists, experts, and enthusiasts who share empowering facts about the region's past, present, and future. Through this immersive journey into the Caribbean experience, this educational series empowers, elevates, and unifies the Caribbean, its various cultures, and its global reach across borders.

"Are the Taino Extinct?"

This Woman Knows Otherwise" (13:34)

Follow Maekiaphan, a Taino woman from the U.S. Virgin Islands, on her journey to reclaim her Taino heritage and to become the first woman Kasiqe (chief) of the Taino tribe. In her efforts to redress the history of colonial erasure, she pursues official recognition of her people



Fireburn the Documentary



"The Fireburn is a story that must be told because it is Virgin Islands' history, African Diaspora history, Danish history, US history, and Caribbean history...as such, it is World history!" - New Day Films

The **labor revolt of 1878**, known as the Fireburn, happened on the island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies (now known as the U.S. Virgin Islands). It was a watershed event that helped shape people's lives, as well as the economy of the region. **This 21-minute short documentary explores the inhumane conditions that existed prior to the labor revolt and looks at the women who were called "Queens" due to their leadership.** The documentary interviews historians, cultural ambassadors, and educators and looks at the folklore, art and history surrounding the Fireburn. [Available on Kanopy](#) | [Learn More](#).



Are the Taino extinct? This woman knows otherwise | PBS

Discover

LISTEN AND LEARN

What lies behind the tensions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic?

In this conversation with Antonio Michael Downing on CBC Listen, acclaimed author and scholar Dr. Myriam J.A. Chancy traces the roots of a relationship shaped by revolution, colonialism, and competing visions of freedom.

Although the Haitian Revolution ended colonial rule across the island, Haiti and the Dominican Republic emerged from very different French and Spanish colonial systems. Dr. Chancy explains how those contrasting histories created distinct expectations of independence, influencing politics, economics, and national identity in ways that still resonate today.

The discussion also explores the powerful historical forces that have shaped the Caribbean more broadly, including the lasting influence of France, Spain, and the United States.

Drawing on her 2024 novel, *Village Weavers*, Dr. Chancy brings these themes to life through the story of two young girls in 1940s Haiti whose friendship crosses deep social divides. Their journeys eventually take them beyond Haiti to France, the Dominican Republic, and the United States, revealing the personal dimensions of migration, class, and belonging.

The conversation concludes with a fascinating look at Vodou, faith, and cultural inheritance. As Dr. Chancy notes, even Haitians who are not initiated into Vodou often remain connected to its traditions because it continues to shape the culture itself.

For anyone interested in Caribbean history, identity, and the hidden forces behind contemporary tensions, this conversation offers both historical insight and a deeply human perspective.



LISTEN

Discover

FULL LESSON PLAN

In this engaging **Ethnic Studies module**, students will:

- investigate a historical community or movement
- examine the ethical responsibilities of representation, and
- create a historically grounded fictional character whose voice, choices, and identity are shaped by real social, political, and cultural contexts.

Through primary and secondary source **historical research, character development, perspective writing**, and peer reflection, students deepen their understanding of how individuals experience history while practicing *critical Ethnic Studies skills* such as inquiry, perspective-taking, and responsible storytelling.



Discover

FULL LESSON PLAN

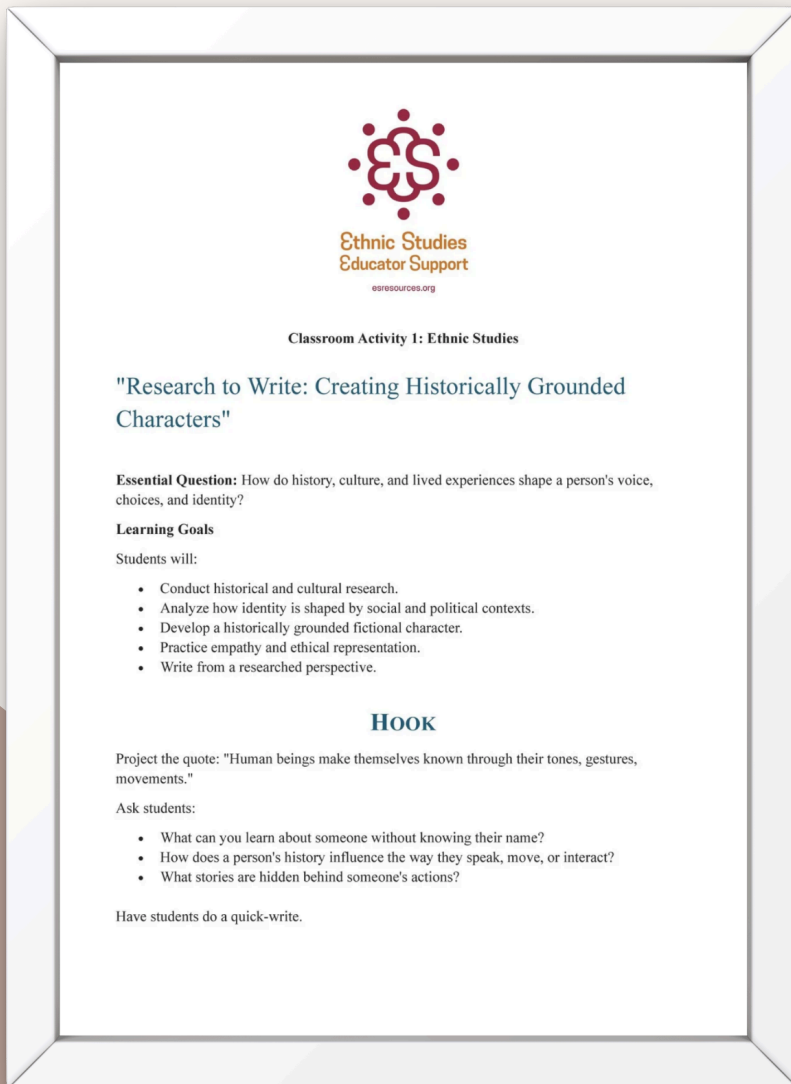
“

The voices declare where they have been and where they want to go. They are the true architects of the stories they inhabit. If their stories are paths, then the novels within which they breathe life are houses, each room belonging to a distinct character who embellishes it.

”

Human beings make themselves known through their tones, gestures, movements.

Myriam J.A. Chancy



VIEW AND DOWNLOAD

WHAT ETHICAL CHOICES DO YOU MAKE WHEN WRITING ABOUT SILENCE OR MARGINALIZED FIGURES?

Dr. Myriam J.A. Chancy in Conversation with Maya Gwynn | KVCR | "Black Perspectives"



I take that question really seriously ... I'm Haitian by birth. Both my parents are Haitian from different class background ... having that background enables me to really think through when I'm creating a character. Not only who are they in the world, you know, what is their background, but also what do I need to learn in order to make sure that I'm fully representing that person? So I do my research, and I take it very seriously, because my readers, whatever their background, but especially if they're Haitian, especially if they're Caribbean, especially if they're Black, queer, or come from lower income backgrounds, will say "that does" or "does not reflect my background."



PART 1 ETHICAL REPRESENTATION MINI-LESSON

Use inspiration from the question posed to Dr. Chaney: "What ethical choices do you make when writing about someone or imagining futures?"

Follow with Chaney's interview statement about learning history as a way to represent individuals and communities accurately, responsibly, and respectfully. Engage a classroom discussion on norms, expectations, and both community and authorial accountability.

Discussion:

When writing about communities and histories:

- What is the difference between representation and stereotype?
- How can research help us write responsibly?
- What stories are often missing from textbooks?

Students create an "Ethical Writer's Checklist."

Examples:

- ✓ Base details on evidence.
- ✓ Avoid stereotypes.
- ✓ Represent complexity.
- ✓ Acknowledge systems and historical context.
- ✓ Show humanity before labels.

PART 2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT RESEARCH

Assign or let students choose a topic connected to your Ethnic Studies unit.

Examples: Caribbean migration, Japanese American incarceration, Chicano Movement, Black organizing / community programs, Filipino farmworker organizing, Indigenous displacement, movement, and revitalization.



2

Students Research:		
Historical Snapshot	Everyday Life	Sources
• Time period • Location • Major events • Political conditions • Social challenges	• Family structures • Education • Work opportunities • Language(s) • Cultural traditions • Community spaces	Require at least: • 2 primary sources • 2 secondary sources

PART 3 CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RESEARCH

Students create a fictional character who could realistically exist within that historical context.

Character Research Sheet

Identity	• Name • Age • Gender • Ethnicity/Cultural background • Languages spoken
Historical Position	• Where do they live? • What major historical events affect them? • What systems of power shape their life?
Voice	• What phrases might they use? • What topics matter to them? • What emotions do they carry?
Movement & Gesture Inspired by Dr. Chaney's quote:	• How do they walk? • What habits do they have? • What gestures reveal their personality? • What physical actions communicate things they never say aloud?
Conflict	• What obstacle are they facing? • What choice must they make? • What allies or support do they have?



3

PART 4 CHARACTER VOICE WRITING

Students write one of the following:

Option A: Diary Entry

A day in the life of the character.

Option B: Letter

Written to a family member, friend, or future generation.

Option C: Monologue

The character explains a difficult decision they must make.

Require students to incorporate:

- Three researched historical details
- One cultural detail
- One challenge connected to historical circumstances

PART 5 GALLERY WALK - "THE VOICES WE INHABIT"

Post character profiles around the room.

Students circulate and leave notes:

- What historical influences are visible?
- What makes this character feel authentic?
- What questions do you still have?



4

Extension Activity: "Character Interview"

Students pair up.

One student becomes their character while the other acts as a journalist, historian, or community researcher.

Questions:

- What do you fear?
- What do you hope for?
- What do people misunderstand about your community?
- How has history shaped your life?
- What future do you imagine?

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

CRITERIA	EXCEEDS	MEETS	DEVELOPING
Historical Research	Rich, accurate, multiple sources	Accurate research	Limited research
Character Development	Complex and nuanced	Clear and believable	Surface-level
Use Of Historical Context	Deeply integrated	Present throughout	Minimal connection
Voice & Perspective	Distinct and authentic	Consistent	Inconsistent
Ethical Representation	Demonstrates care and complexity	Generally respectful	Relies on assumptions

REFLECTION EXIT TICKET

Ask students: Which part of your character came directly from research, and which part required imagination? How did you balance both responsibly? Do you see yourself in your character?

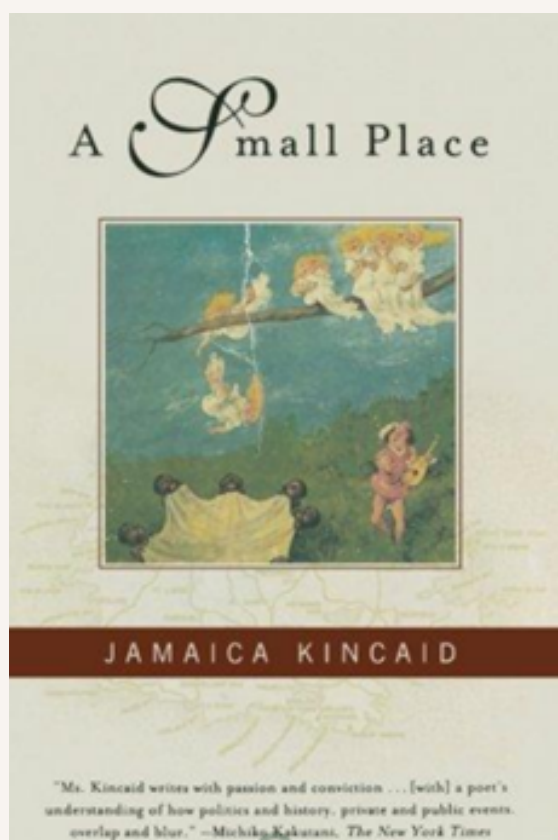
This reflection helps students understand a central Ethnic Studies skill: using research not just to learn history, but to understand how people experience and live through history – as well as our situatedness inside interconnected stories.



5

DOWNLOAD LESSON PLAN PDF

Discover



"If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. If you come by aeroplane, you will land at the V. C. Bird International Airport. Vere Cornwall (V. C.) Bird is the Prime Minister of Antigua. You may be the sort of tourist who would wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him – why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some great public monument? You are a tourist and you have not yet seen..." So begins Jamaica Kincaid's expansive essay, which shows us what we have not yet seen of the ten-by-twelve-mile island in the British West Indies where she grew up. Lyrical, sardonic, and forthright by turns, in a Swiftian mode, *A Small Place* cannot help but amplify our vision of one small place and all that it signifies. [Digital access](#) (Grades 9-12+)

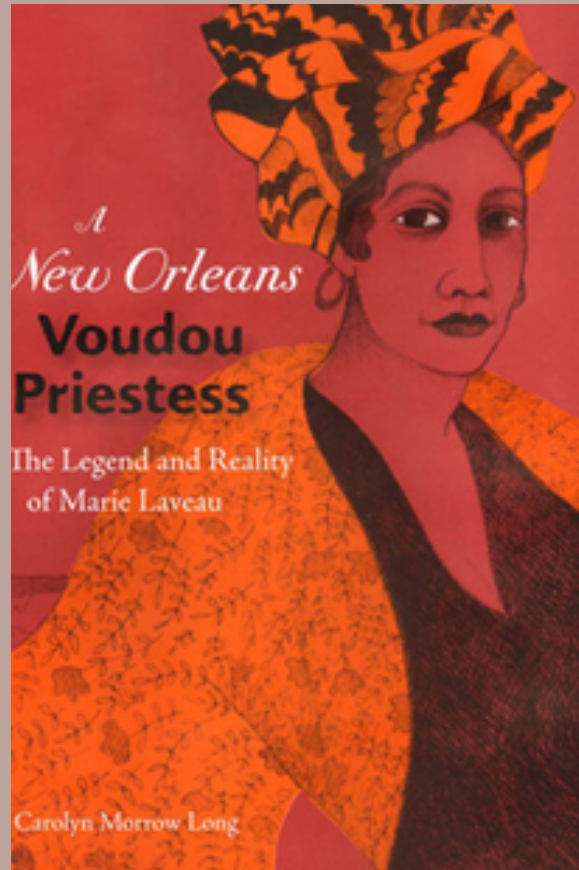


A young adult novel narrated by a Black trans teen as he grapples "with identity and self-discovery while falling in love for the first time."

Penguin Random House Books
by Caribbean and Caribbean
American Authors

READING RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Legendary for an unusual combination of spiritual power, beauty, charisma, showmanship, intimidation, and shrewd business sense, Marie Leveau also was known for her kindness and charity, nursing yellow fever victims and ministering to condemned prisoners, and her devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. In separating verifiable fact from semi-truths and complete fabrication, Carolyn Morrow Long explores the unique social, political, and legal setting in which the lives of Laveau's African and European ancestors became intertwined in nineteenth-century New Orleans.

National Immigrant Heritage Month

IN CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

National Immigrant Heritage Month honors the diverse histories, languages, cultures, and contributions of immigrant communities across the United States. These experiences are **extraordinarily varied**. *Some communities arrived through voluntary migration, others through displacement, exclusion, or forced movement. Some maintained ancestral languages across generations, while others experienced language loss through assimilation, state policies, or historical disruption.*

The experiences of Asian American, Pacific Islander, Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, African American, Native American, and the countless communities that make up this country cannot be reduced to a single narrative. Rather than attempting a broad survey, this section offers a focused case: **Yiddish**, a language carried across borders by generations of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants and shaped, lost, or reclaimed through migration, assimilation, cultural change, and historical rupture. Even within the Jewish diaspora, Yiddish language and culture are also not the exclusive customs of Jewish diaspora. Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, and countless other means of communication remain part of global Jewish inheritances. With Yiddish as one example, we can explore broader questions that resonate across many ethnic studies contexts:

- *How do communities preserve language across generations?*
- *What happens when cultural practices are lost, adapted, or reclaimed?*
- *How do migration, displacement, memory, and inheritance shape identity and belonging?*

While rooted in a particular community, the story of Yiddish provides one lens through which students can examine larger questions of continuity, cultural preservation, and community life. **Here is a story about reviving an ancestral language and, in the process, rediscovering the lost fragments of a culture.** This story is a celebration of inheritance, a testimony of immigration and widespread assimilation, and an effort to find continuity after rupture.

THE YIDDISH REVIVAL



Yiddish Resistance Art Print by cartoonist Emily K.

“

Yiddish has always been more than just a means of communication. It is a guardian of Jewish culture, tradition, and heritage.

-Ghila Amati

“

*Some survivors focused on **learning the languages they would need to rebuild their lives ... during the second half of the 20th century, Yiddish was repressed by forced assimilation***

-Shaked Karabelnicoff

Discover

LEARN BASIC FACTS
ABOUT YIDDISH

READ ABOUT THE
CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF YIDDISH

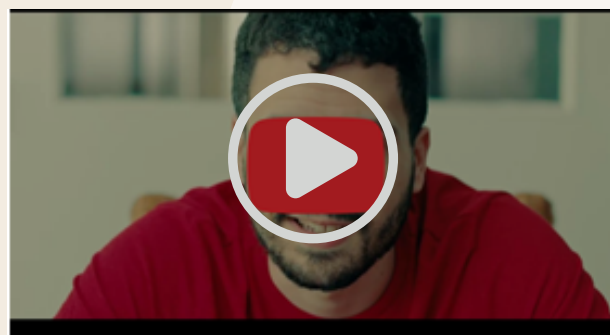
Discover

WATCH & LISTEN



An American Pickle

An American Pickle (PG-13, 2020) stars actor and comedian Seth Rogen (who plays two characters simultaneously). Plot: Preserved in pickle brine for 100 years, an Orthodox Jewish factory worker wakes up in New York City in the 21st century and tracks down his great-grandson. Themes: memory, intergenerational trauma, immigration & assimilation, shiva (mourning), tensions between Orthodoxy and modernity, and cultural pride & identity development across time and place.



Puerto Rican Jew

Plot: "Puerto Rican man takes a DNA test and discovers he's half Jewish. What follows is a heartfelt and humorous journey of identity and self-discovery" | A 12 minute award-winning short film blending comedy and drama to explore themes of heritage, culture and belonging. Featuring and directed by Louis Carrasco. Languages: English, Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL), Hebrew.

YidLife Crisis

Eli Batalion and Jamie Elman call their series *YidLife Crisis*, "the identity crisis one has reconciling their old world inheritance with their new world lifestyle." In this documentary comedy, they "step onto Swedish soil to unearth a hidden treasure trove...unraveling the little-known history of Sweden's Jewish community...Through *meshugenah* encounters and eye-opening revelations, they explore tales spanning 250 years, from the earliest Jewish immigrants to discovering how Yiddish, an almost forgotten language, became a protected government-recognized language in Sweden."



“

*The **fate of a language can be as unpredictable as the fate of a people** ... In 1945, the future of Yiddish looked bleak. Millions of **its speakers had been murdered**, and the audience for Yiddish literature was practically wiped out. Many **survivors focused on learning ... the languages they needed to build new lives** ... But nearly 60 years later ... the melodies our grandparents laughed and cried to are played in places where twenty-somethings gather, from New Orleans jazz clubs to Montreal cafés.”*

-Aviya Kushner, award-winning author

QUEERING YIDDISH



I first learned to be queer by being Jewish. That is, by the time I came out as a lesbian I had already learned to love being **part of an outsider community** and to **value the perspective it offered on the world at large.** Being Jewish made coming out as a young lesbian that much easier. I am certain this oft-noted parallel is part of the reason for perennially large numbers of queers at Yiddishist gatherings. Yiddish itself has been relegated over time to the marginalia of an already marginal population, so Queerness and Yiddishism by now seem a natural shidekh.*

-Alicia Svigals

*Also spelled *shidduch*, this Yiddish word literally means a traditional arranged marriage, the author uses it here to describe a perfectly fitting partnership between two marginalized identities that naturally understand and support one another on the fringes of society.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Language, Identity, Cultural Memory, and Ways of Knowing

- *Epistemology*: How people come to know, understand, and make meaning in the world.
- *Positionality*: The experiences, identities, and social locations that shape how people see an issue.
- *Standpoint Reasoning*: Using a person's position in society to understand why they may interpret events differently from others.

This section explores Yiddish through a variety of cultural expressions, including language, literature, music, film, storytelling, and personal narratives. Using one or more resources from this section, examine how art and culture preserve memory, communicate identity, and shape belonging.

Guiding Question: How does your inheritance shape what you notice?

PART ONE

Identifying Positionality

Positionality refers to the identities, experiences, communities, and historical circumstances that shape how people understand the world. Review the selected resources and discuss:

- *Who is speaking, writing, creating, or being represented? What evidence from the resource helps you identify their positionality?*
 - *What aspects of their identity, community, or history appear in their perspective?*
 - *How have experiences such as immigration, assimilation, language loss, genocide, cultural preservation, or cultural revival influenced their viewpoints?*
-

PART TWO

Examining Epistemology

Epistemology refers to ways of knowing and understanding the world. Using examples from the selected resources, discuss:

- *How is knowledge passed inside language? How might that knowledge be different from information that learned solely through a textbook, second-hand story, or historical account?*
- *What knowledge about culture, identity, memory, belonging, or lived experience emerges through understanding the language?*
- *In what ways can language carry culture, memory, values, or ways of seeing the world?*
- *What knowledge might be lost when a language declines or the majority of its speakers disappears?*

PART THREE

Applying Standpoint Reasoning

Standpoint reasoning asks us to consider how social position and lived experience influence interpretation. Choose one idea, quotation, story, or scene from a resource in this section and guide students to analyze:

- *How does the creator's or community's standpoint shape their interpretation of language, identity, memory, or belonging? What insights become visible because of that standpoint?*
- *Why is it important to consider multiple standpoints when studying culture, history, and identity?*

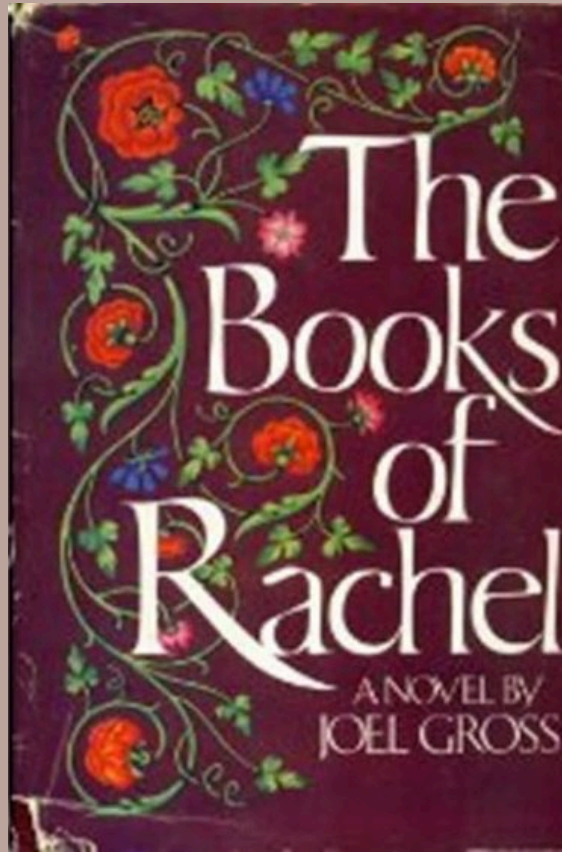


DIVE DEEPER

Yiddish is one of many Jewish languages, and Yiddish culture is part of **a large tapestry of Jewish epistemologies**. Jewish immigrant stories from the Middle East and North Africa can be taught using the “[Sephardi and Mizrahi Education Toolkit](#).” You can also learn and teach about [Libyan Jews](#) using personal stories, history, and cultural artifacts.

READING RECOMMENDATION

AN INTERGENERATIONAL NOVEL



This novel tells a story of migration, immigration, repetitive refugee experiences across five generations - and an uncertainty about where the family is from. The prologue begins in 1979 New York with a daughter's wedding-eve question, "Do you really think we came from Spain?" and a father's response: "I don't know. The name of the stone is Spanish." *The Books of Rachel* is a sweeping historical epic that chronicles a Sephardic Jewish family over 500 years. It follows the family through a magnificent heirloom (a stone) passed down to the firstborn daughter of every generation, each named "Rachel." Told in five parts, the novel moves through Inquisition-era Spain, 17th century Venice (pogroms), 18th century Berlin, pre-Mandate Jerusalem under Ottoman rule, WWII-era England, and, finally, 20th century United States.

CALIFORNIA ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM (ESMC)

Lesson 1:

Migration Stories and Oral History

Lesson 4:

Introducing Narratives

Lesson 6:

Classical Africa and Other Major Civilizations

Lesson 9:

#BlackLivesMatter and Social Change

Lesson 10:

Afrofuturism: Reimagining Black Futures and Science Fiction

Lesson 26:

This is Indian Land: The Purpose, Politics, and Practice of Land Acknowledgment

Lesson 28.1:

Additional Topics in Native American Studies

Lesson 27:

Develop or Preserve? The Shellmound Sacred Site Struggle



Ethnic Studies Educator Support

esresources.org



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