



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2015 Volume III: History in Our Everyday Lives

Looking at Desegregation through Local Narratives: A Case Study at Tulsa Central High School

Curriculum Unit 15.03.06, published September 2015
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Introduction

The day my students and I first watched the segment of *Eyes on the Prize* about Little Rock High School's disastrous year of forced integration, they all turned to me and said, "I thought this was about our Central, What happened here?" My internal response mimicked that famous phrase uttered by Homer Simpson "DOH!" The students gave me the task of finding out about the desegregation of our Central High School in Tulsa, OK.

In history, there is always the debate about who writes history and how does it affect its authenticity. The best way to fill in history is to use other narratives or stories such interviews, diaries, and personal accounts about history from a multitude of sources in addition to the official ones. With each new source we add a layer to history and we come closer and closer to the truth. Public history is the process of adding public, non-academic narratives to the academic history to get a much richer and vibrant history that begins to reflect other voices. Another aspect of public history is the idea that we live in our history every day. There is a Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd or a building from the art deco period of Tulsa's history that we drive past every day. Mary Lui, Professor of American Studies and History at Yale University writes "What makes certain moments in our history worth remembering and commemorating in the form of family stories, public monuments, preserving in historic houses and libraries, or evoking in songs or film?"¹ The answer to this question comes from looking at the first aspect of public history, the public narratives as well as the academic ones. This unit is about how these monuments, buildings and memorials are interpreted not only from the "at the time" perspective, but also from our point of view today.

In trying to understand the complexity of race relations and personal identity, looking at the experiences of others besides those told in the dominant official work is very necessary. In the wonderful series *Eyes on the Prize*, we began to see the narrative of the disenfranchised minority. We can't stop there. Not every school had the experiences that Little Rock's Central had. We must continue adding layers and finding the public voice in our own communities. In this unit, I want to use the story of Tulsa Central as the frame for understanding local desegregation processes. We will not freeze history in the 1950s or 1960s, but will use our voice to show timelines and stories well into the 1970s and even address the state of race relations today.

The history of Central High School pre-dates Oklahoma Statehood. Tulsa's first school at the turn of the 20th Century was an Indian comprehensive school that allowed whites to attend. That school was granted

independent status in 1905 as Central High School. In 1917, during the oil boom, construction was completed on the four story building that would be Central High (from now on referred to as "Old Central"). The English Renaissance style showed the wealth and privilege which included the underground pools, gymnasium, and running track. An extension area was added a few years later, which had tennis courts, manual arts and a business education center. In 1938, Old Central was the second largest high school in the United States, hosting around 5000 students.² Now, our Central High is one of the smallest high schools in Tulsa Public Schools (TPS); the student body is only around 500 students today.³

As Old Central, the student body was white and Native American and there were programs and activities of all kinds. It was a nationally renowned school from which many famous, successful and wealthy Tulsans graduated. In contrast, Booker T. Washington High School (Booker T) was the all-black high school. Now, Booker T is the premier, largest, and most diverse school in TPS⁴, and a nationally ranked "Top School" by US News and World Report.⁵ Most of Central's students now think that Booker T gets a disproportionately large amount of money and attention than all the other schools in TPS. What happened to reverse the roles? Even more important, how did those changes affect individuals, communities, and the whole history of Tulsa? Perhaps the answer can be found in the archives, records of federal mandates that came from the Civil Rights movement and oral histories as well as from the building itself.

Background

My students are wonderful kids who have endured challenges many citizens in our own city could not begin to imagine. Statistically, students at Central are almost 80% African American or of mixed ancestry (many Native Americans are also African American), and only 6% are Hispanic and 13% Caucasian, with the last one percent being self-identified as only Native American.⁶ It is the least diverse school in TPS. Our students are usually years behind their grade level, especially in math and reading, the areas in which we are most evaluated. A lot of our students have home challenges including non-family living situations, poverty, drug abuse, and even involvement with the criminal justice system.

When they come to school tired from working a full time job or without having eaten, it is very difficult to get them to care about a history class. The students tell me that they don't "do" history, and thus have no desire to try. Therefore, when those students were excited to learn about our Central's history, I knew I had to find a way to help them discover it.

The idea of using public history, the stories and events of our time and location, to put meaning may be a relatively new field of history, but it is a very important one to help my students connect in a very real way. For example, I can show a picture of the Lincoln Memorial and tell the history of it being conceived and installed in Washington, D.C. But, when I add pictures and video from 1939 showing Marian Anderson singing "My Country Tis of Thee" in front of the memorial because she wasn't welcome to Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution, we get a new perspective which shows a different meaning to the Lincoln Memorial.⁷ If I can add a student's voice, perhaps from a family trip, then I have even more narrative layers and more connections.

I teach on-level US History (1877 - Present), AP US History (APUSH) and African American History. I plan to use

this unit in some form in all three. It can be adapted to fit the student's needs, classroom time restrictions, and class aims or focus. For example, the history of Central is a perfect way to explore the theme of identity from the AP themes. The theme of identity helps students discuss how groups are defined and how the relations between those groups can change or stay the same over time. It encourages historiographical skills of putting isolated events into context by showing that continuity and change. We understand better current race relations when we see those relations develop throughout US History. I think the true connection to history for my students will only come when we see how Old Central is a great showcase of the changing definition of what a Central student looks like and how that in turn changed race relations in North and West Tulsa. The changes and continuities from 1954 - 1976 include, but are not limited to: desegregation, the civil rights movement, federal mandates to schools in the Nixon era, white-flight and the subsequent resegregation of the inner-city.

Desegregation

The 1954 *Brown v The Board of Education* decision started the push for desegregation in Oklahoma, where segregation was both *de jure* (by law) and *de facto* (in fact). In the 1957 - 1958 school year, the same year that the "Little Rock Nine" fought for a place at their Central High School, five black students walked the halls of Tulsa's Old Central. Unlike the Little Rock story, no lines of protesting whites shouted, no guard troops blocked the doors and no national media followed them around. Juan Dola Washington and Deloris Hardeman began as juniors; Charlie Jones, Louie Moore and Peaches Littlejohn started as sophomores. ⁸ I have placed the yearbook pictures from that year in Appendix A, Figure 1.

In a 1997 interview with the *Tulsa World*⁹, Louie Moore reflected on how he felt accepted and welcomed at Old Central. "I did not have a problem" Moore said, "I felt like I was treated equal. I was quite comfortable at Central." Peaches Littlejohn said in the same news report that students seemed to be proud of the "novelty of black students and most were eager to make black friends." Charlie Jones was a little different in that he was mixed race, half-white and half-black. He said he really didn't feel fully accepted anywhere, although Central was much better for him than the still all-black Booker T. In 1959, Juan Dola became the first black graduate followed a year later by the others. There is no public record of why Deloris Hardeman did not attend Central her senior year. More black students enrolled each year so that in 1966 the black student population was about 10% of the more than 2500 students enrolled: a percentage that was mirrored in the city of Tulsa itself. Those first 10 years of integration came and went with little social turmoil or unrest.

The Civil Rights Movement

In 1958, several years before the lunch-counter sit-ins in Greensboro, NC, Clara Luper, a black primary schoolteacher, and 13 of her young black students sat at the segregated front of the lunch counter at Katz Department store in Oklahoma City.¹⁰ They sat for two days before one of the workers finally decided to serve a child a hamburger. Almost immediately the tension eased. Four years later, when Civil Rights leaders and black students from all the Tulsa high schools organized to sit-in at restaurants and movie houses, Clara Luper

was invited to help. While there is no official record of where the student participants were from, we can assume that at least a few were from Central. These sit-ins were met with arrests by local police, but not by violence from the police or counter protesters. On one occasion, Tulsa NAACP leader, Benjamin Roberts said that more than 600 protesters were arrested.¹¹ The students kept up the protests until one by one the establishments gave in and served their black customers along with the whites. As time wore on, more and more businesses gave in on the first challenge to segregation policies because of pressure from the public.

A great deal of this pressure came from the support of local news organizations that presented a fair picture of both sides of the story. The *Tulsa Star* and *The Oklahoma Eagle*, black run newspapers, pointed out injustices and the traditional newspapers such as the *Tulsa World* and *Tulsa Tribune* would occasionally republish some of their articles, placing even more pressure on the public. The senior editor of the *Eagle* was also the leader of the movement in Tulsa and the head pastor at the Vernon AME Church in downtown Tulsa. The Reverend Ben Hill and his wife Fannie Hill lead many student protests. Fannie Hill herself led students to Mohawk Park which at the time was a country club type of park, golf course and zoo and one of two elaborate parks with all the amenities. It was whites only, until, Mrs. Hill and her students protested daily to gain admittance.

Meanwhile, back at Old Central, black and white students participated together not only in the classrooms, but in a limited way, in clubs, sports and activities. Outside of the sports arena, it was a slow process because of resistance from both black and white cultures. Lawrence “Night Train” Lane (graduate 1966) talks about some of these issues in his 1969 interview in the *Tulsa Tribune*. Night Train was in basketball, A Capella choir, Key Club and Student Council. He found that his challenge was from blacks. “When a Negro is accepted by the white community, he is put on the spot by other Negroes who aren’t accepted”.¹² On the other hand, some of the premier clubs like the Camarata, a girl’s service group, said they were open to all students, but yearbook photos of the years 1958 – 1975 show very few, if any, faces that aren’t white. Was it reluctance to join on the part of black students or was it a symptom of discrimination within the school? The answer cannot be known for sure, but the lack of diversity did not change until after Old Central closed in 1975.

Nixon Era Federal Mandates and White-Flight

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a giant step forward for many and showed the progression of the government in recognizing all its citizens. However, this step did not translate to all levels; the federal mandates needed to be equally applied at state and local levels. The Act wasn’t applied equally; it wasn’t enough to say to do it. Many schools, cities, and localities found ways around the Act. TPS was no exception. In May of 1965, TPS submitted a plan for desegregation to the US Commissioner of Education. The plan had almost no changes that would actually see any real desegregation in Tulsa schools. However, the Commissioner approved the plan on August 31, 1965.¹³

The desegregation plan mandated students to attend the school closest to them, regardless of race. The school also redrew a few school boundaries to make it a little more integrated. Nonetheless, all progress made by the plan was undone when the school board allowed for transfers intra-district, based only on the desire of parents to avoid having their children in an undesirable school. A *Tulsa Tribune* article in 1959 said that Burroughs Elementary school had passed a 50% majority in favor of black students. The Superintendent is quoted as saying “We have had some inquires....that when a school becomes predominately Negro or white the parents of children in whichever group is in the minority may request a transfer to another school.” The

article further states that since the beginning of the school year 45 of 64 requests by white students to transfer out of Burroughs were granted based on “medical or special reasons”¹⁴

In 1968 the Attorney General of the US filed a suit on TPS charging that the district failed to comply with its constitutional duty to maintain and operate integrated schools. There were four main points to the suit: (1) Assigning students by designing school attendance zones in such a manner as to segregate students on the basis of race, (2) Permitting transfers of students which in some instances had the purpose and effect of segregating students on the basis of race, (3) Assigning faculty and staff members among various schools on a racially segregated basis, and (4) Constructing new schools and additions to schools on the basis of policies and practices which in some instances have the purpose and effect of segregating students on the basis of race.¹⁵

On appeal, the District Judge dismissed the charges saying that the plan of 1965 met the standards because Tulsa’s segregation at that point was *de facto* and not *de jure* segregation. In other words, TPS was not forcing the separation as it was naturally occurring based on where people lived. Nonetheless, the fact that the Attorney General even filed a suit must have been a wake-up call, as that same year, TPS reversed the former transfer policy. They said that students who were in a majority school could freely transfer to a school where they would be in the minority. This would supposedly open up all schools to all races. The League of Women Voters in Tulsa reported that the change in policy resulted in only four white students transferring to black majority schools; but about 200 blacks relocated to white schools, most of which were to Old Central. Within two years Old Central’s minority population rose from around 10% to 16%, a large difference considering Old Central’s enrollment was about 2100 students at that time.

The change in policy created an immediate backlash from whites in the city. The TPS plan for integration was countered by the migration of whites from TPS schools district to suburban schools in the southeast part of the city. Between 1960 and 1970, 85% of the new housing units were in the southeast part of the US Census Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). The southeast of Tulsa is almost fully encompassed by other school districts, such as: Union Public Schools, and Bixby, Jenks, and Broken Arrow, which are not part of TPS, even though they may have a Tulsa address. In the years that followed, the student enrollment in the area schools also shifted. In 1968, the district student enrollment peaked at 80,116. By 1974, the district lost 14,136 students. Figure 2, in Appendix A, demonstrates this by showing the growth in the SMSA of the districts outside of TPS. The Indian Nations Council of Governments, a local civic group, stated that the “unprecedented residential growth immediately outside the district ... provided a sanctuary for fleeing whites”.¹⁶ The concept of white-flight is definitely not part of my student’s knowledge base, but it should be. There is probably no other factor in the economic, social, and political realms that has more impact on their daily lives.

In 1968, the district’s attempt to further integration by involuntarily reassigning faculty members did not meet with success. Many teachers resigned instead of accepting their new assignment. Also, many in the black community protested that the move took the best black teachers and put them in white schools, while the white teachers reassigned to black schools were said to be the worst ones. In 1970, the school board experienced limited success in attempting to make all schools mirror the district’s student population percentages of 88% white, 12% black.

The sudden increase of approximately 125 new black students in 1968 at Old Central led to the first cases of racial tension and unrest in the school in the more than ten years of integration. The 1969 – 1970 school year had many incidents and fights; several articles in the Tulsa newspapers discussed these events. The first week

of November 1969 was a particularly rough one. Tensions erupted into violence with fists, chains and even knives. Both black and white participated in the unrest. Although no one was seriously hurt, school and police officials closed school early on Friday the 7th of November to create a “cooling off period”. The police and school officials found upon combining their experiences that many of the agitators were not students at the school, (even though many said they were) but rather were “outsiders and drop outs,”¹⁷ thereby implying that the five black youth who were arrested were the whole trouble. Even Night Train Lane said, “These Black former students and non-students who feel the white majority is above them try to get the well-adjusted, integrated Negro student to conform to their ways... Those agitators who are going to school should be dealt with severely.”¹⁸ In the *Tribune* article, written on November 8th, the school administration said that really all the students, both black and white, just wanted to go to school in peace.¹⁹

Both school officials and police said that they were going to tighten access to the school grounds to keep outsiders out. There was a temporary respite of hostilities during the holidays, when things seemed to be over. Tensions flared again as January wore on and as school resumed after the holiday break. The newspapers of the time carried several stories about the unrest. One article spoke of a mother’s concern for her son’s safety, even after speaking with the Principal. Other parents were cited with similar stories. The implication of the article was that the administration of Central was not doing enough to protect the students. A very charged, anonymous opinion piece on Jan 30, 1970 said “Either these elements will be dismissed, isolated and, if necessary jailed, or Central High will turn into a jungle.” The writer goes on to say, “The truth is that there are some people who are incapable of absorbing academically-oriented high school education. Like children, there are not contemplative but action-oriented. In short they react to problems and frustrations with tantrums.” The article never directly refers to “Negroes,” the black students, but the verbiage is clearly a heritage of the age of Jim Crow.²⁰

From the lack of further articles after the ones in February, it seems that the tensions were kept to a manageable level. The *Tom Tom Yearbook* for 1970 certainly mentions challenges, but the students ended the school year with hope. Opening and closing section editors, Edwin Baswell and Connie Gould said “We discussed, challenged, delved into ourselves in order to understand one another. We weren’t always successful, but looking back we realize the mistakes we made...Finally, it’s over. We leave Central with a better understanding of other people. Maybe, years from now, we’ll look back and find life was a little easier with that knowledge.”²¹

Despite tensions, TPS felt that they had to push for integration if they wanted to avoid busing, which to them was the ultimate threat. The 1969 Supreme Court case of *Alexander v Holmes County Board of Education* said the time for “all deliberate speed” mentioned in the *Brown v Board* case had run out. The school district decided to create workshops and programs to help not only the students but also the sponsors, coaches, teachers and staff. The goal was to talk through issues about minority student enrollment and their involvement in school activities. Another *Tribune* article on November 8, 1969 talked about these tensions in particular. The principal was quoted as saying the unrest is an “accumulation of misunderstanding and subtle and over expression of prejudice between black and white students, and teachers and black students.”²²

The landmark case of *Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1970) took the last hope for TPS to say that students should go to their local school, even if doing so continued *de facto* segregation. Many states believed that *Brown v Board* held that you couldn’t enforce segregation. *Swann* clarified the previous order saying that the goal needed to be integration and that school busing to achieve integration is constitutional and necessary. TPS officials began a slow process of figuring out what to do. At Central, by 1970, there was

almost a 20% black student population; therefore busing was not used at Central. However, many of the middle and elementary schools that fed into Central did have to have busing in order to fully integrate.

On July 23, 1971, US District Judge Frederick A. Daugherty ordered TPS to meet the following standards: First the ratio of black to white teachers had to reflect the population of the city and that all staffing should be as individuals without regards to race. The third and fourth standards had to do with transfers. All transfers from a minority school to a majority school had to have documented cause, but transfers from majority to minority schools should be granted freely. The standard also stated that special assistance, such as reading programs, should be given in black majority schools. However, it was the second standard, which was about school construction and site selection that had the greatest impact on Central.

Old Central reached a crisis point. The growth of downtown was forcing expansion of local highways and traffic dispersal loops. Central's extension areas were in the way. With more and more students driving, parking and space became a major problem. Also, as iconic and beautiful as Old Central was, it was at the point that either major funds would have to be invested in renovations, or a new school would have to be built. The school board made the decision to look at new construction. In light of the 1971 court mandate, the site selection committee looked for a location that would lead to a more fully integrated school. They chose the current location of the 3100 block of Edison, merely 6 miles from Old Central, but worlds apart culturally.

The new neighborhood, Gilcrease, was filled with a mix of old row houses built for refinery and railroad workers and the once elegant, but now crumbling mansions in the Gilcrease Hills, with a few old craftsman houses in between. In other words, the new area had a mixture of black, white and Indian that truly satisfied the integration objective. It is unlikely that School Board knew that white-flight and suburbanization would take Central from integrated to *de facto* segregation within two decades. The Board placed Central in an area of the genteel middle class, with one major exception, the museum of Thomas Gilcrease, a graduate of Central. He left his mansion in Gilcrease Hills and a vast art collection to the public. Most Central students have been in the museum multiple times without understanding the history of Thomas Gilcrease and how that intersects with their own lives. Like many public historical places, it has lost its original intention to the new audience that passes by each day. In 2015, this area is missing out on the beginnings of the downtown gentrification process. New Central and indeed all of the Gilcrease neighborhoods are separated by highways and railroad tracks only a few feet from all the reinvestment.²³

At the same time that the selection committee was looking for a place for New Central, the school board also searched for a way to desegregate the still all-black high school of Booker T. In 1972, the school board submitted a plan to try a magnet metro learning center within Booker T. The plan failed in the first year. The second year, the 1973 - 1974 school year the plan, was totally revamped. The school board and Superintendent told all the students living within the boundaries of Booker T that they had to reapply to return. The school district then opened enrollment for 600 whites and 600 black students who were the honors students of all the other schools in the district. While the first year they had less than their goal, they did have almost 500 whites and almost 600 blacks. The plan also reassigned all of Booker T's teachers, picking only the best, both black and white. As part of the plan submitted on the annual report to the federal courts to show compliance to the mandates of 1971, the board and superintendent also set aside more resources for the students, to help the experiment succeed. It did. Within 3 years, Booker T was heading the top of the list in academics, college admissions and even many academic competitions in areas such as speech and debate, or orchestra. The TPS administration was able to do this by forcing students who did not meet or maintain their criteria into other high schools. TPS used involuntary or forced busing to move the neighborhood students who did not get admitted to Booker T to other schools in the district.

Busing continued well into the 1980s, even after the federal mandates had expired. As Booker T became a showcase school for TPS, the school board provided more resources to help it maintain that status. Sometime in the mid-1990s, Booker T opened school to all students who live within the boundaries, as well as those who are there for the International Baccalaureate or Advanced Placement magnet. Nonetheless, each year I have students in my classes at Central who actually should be going to Booker T, but do not want the stress or high expectations of the environment there. The best teachers in TPS still seek to work at Booker T and the school district still does what it can to celebrate the school's successes.

Back at Old Central, the students began a period of mourning for their "Central." Looking at the yearbooks from 1973 - 1975, we see photos of the artifacts that made Central special. In 1975, the editor, Stefanie Sposato, wrote in the opening pages: "Over the years our exterior hasn't changed. The red bricks and white towers were built to outlast the inglorious fate the school board has planned."²⁴ Artistic pictures of the beautiful façade and art work mix with the common ones of students and lockers and desks. At the end of the yearbook a wonderful eulogy of sorts appears. The final words are: "Her [Old Central's] future rests in our memories."²⁵

The building of Old Central is a Tulsa landmark. Its downtown location, just off the highway, brings thousands of people past its doors every day. But, the name etched in stone on the front has been changed from Central High School to that of the Public Service Company of Oklahoma. (PSO) It was proudly restored and is currently maintained by PSO. There are public tours of the old building and it is a stop on several historical walking tours of downtown Tulsa. Most that drive by probably have no idea that it once was Central High School.

The Central High School moved to its new 47 acre campus in time for the 1975 - 1976 school year. In order to ease the transition to the new location, the administration moved many of the works of public art acquired by the school during the 1910s through the 1950s. This included a significant statue called "Appeal to the Great Spirit", a work originally done in 1909 in Boston. The work at Central (see Figure 3 in Appendix A) is one of nine full size plaster works done by the original artist Cyrus Dallin. Later in the 1980s it was used as the cast for a "heroic sized" copy that now stands in Woodard Park in Tulsa. A second artifact based tradition that made the transition from old to new was the "Walk of Fame". The sidewalk leading from the parking lot to the student entrance of the building is edged with a small inclining wall upon which each decade dedicates the memorial to the 10 years it includes. Each graduating class in that decade adds a year plaque at the time of graduation. My students walk past these memorials to classes past with very little thought to the 100 years already represented. There is room for at least 50 more years of graduating classes. Please see figure 4 in Appendix A for a photograph of this walk.

One further effort to tie the traditions of Old Central with New Central has been the Hall of Fame plaques in the main foyer of the school. This tradition started just after New Central began. There is a display of people who have had significant contributions to our society either in business, sports, entertainment or civic duties. On the plaque is an image of the person, along with a brief history and the year of their graduation from Central. Greats such as Paul Harvey, Henry Zarrow, Tony Randall, and George Kaiser line the walls. Men and women are both represented more or less equally. Perhaps not to anyone's surprise there are few people of color. Oddly, even though Central has arguably been integrated since the beginning of the 1960s, 55 years ago, and even though we have been in the new building for 40 years, there is only one person from the era of the new school. He is also the only black face on the wall, John Starks, a 1983 graduate who played in the NBA in the 1990s. He is famous for the first one-handed dunk on Michael Jordan. (See Figure 5 in Appendix A)

Coming full circle to public history memorials, monuments, art and the narratives of those who created them,

lived with them and currently see them really is the whole point of this unit. Can my students see Old Central and imagine what it was like to be a student walking those halls? Do the public works artifacts we maintain have any significance to the students who walk the halls today? How can we use these things to explore our connection to that history? I have many goals for my students, but ultimately I hope to see a different view of our everyday lives through the eyes of my students.

This leads me to the question: what will my students produce to show me that we are making the connections work? First, they will produce some type of graphic, poster or art work to illustrate the major points of the Civil Rights movement intertwined with the major events in Central's history. These will be displayed on the wall opposite my doorway, a wall that most students pass to get to core classes. Of course, to seek other voices, I will challenge them to find friends or family members who went to Central in the 1950s - the 1970s when the school desegregated. The plan is some type of oral history that can be documented so those stories can be told in the future.

To leave a lasting legacy on the school, I want my students to work with the alumni association to help introduce a new phase to the Hall of Fame. To do this students will need to research the list of graduates from the last 40 years and look for deserving individuals who should be nominated to the alumni association. Whether we succeed in changing the Hall of Fame or not, over this whole unit, I have been doing my best to tie the past to something my students can identify as their own history. I hope to use the time dedicated to these topics to show not only the national events of the Civil Rights movement and suburbanization, but also the local and perhaps familial histories that are woven into that national story. Moreover, students should be aware that they can play an important role in writing this history.

State Standards

Oklahoma standards for teaching US History are divided into two groups. The first group is process standards that are loosely based on the ones from the common core. Since our state has officially abandoned the common core, these process standards may be rewritten soon. Nonetheless, they are excellent standards to help students identify, analyze and use history in new ways. We also have content standards that are very specific for all students to learn. As a matter of fact, the standards list hundreds of items that are supposed to be covered. As an "icing on top of the cake" challenge to both students and teacher, US History is the only social science topic that is subject to state end-of-instruction exams; part of a group of seven of which students have to pass four in order to graduate.

Specific content standards include both national and state items. Under the heading of the Civil Rights movement, students are required to assess the effects of the legal attacks on segregation by the NAACP and Thurgood Marshall and to know about the Supreme Court cases of *Sipuel v Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* (1948) and *McLaurin v Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*. The Ada Sipuel case is of particular importance because it reversed an earlier case and became the precedent that *Brown v the Board* would hang upon. Students are required to analyze *Brown* and explain *de jure* and *de facto* segregation. Both the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School and the lunch counter sit-ins led by Clara Luper are also content requirements. Of course they also need to know about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. There are also lists of specific items that are not implicitly covered in the presentation of this unit, but which pertain to the civil rights movement. Please see Appendix B,

for a complete list. After reading the content of Central High School’s history, it is very easy to see how the whole movement and its effects can be taught from a local perspective as well as the national one.

No matter what standards are given, or what state or country the teacher is from, we can find that the national or official story doesn’t completely represent the whole story. Even towns such as Little Rock, Greensboro, or Selma can explore their history from the perspective of others. The more inclusive we make our academic history the more open we become to the voices of others; the more we make lasting connections.

Teaching Strategies

Many of these strategies will be modified to fit the individual students in the classroom. Some of my students are very low readers. Differentiation is very compatible with the types of projects I have listed below. Students with IEPs or with lower reading scores will be given modified assignments by using smaller readings, oral responses to guiding questions using a technology tool, or giving leveled testing. Those in the APUSH classes, on the other hand, will be given less prompts and will have more writing to assess informally and formally whether understand the concepts presented.

As a class we will be reading primary sources especially with some of the mentioned court cases: *Sipuel*, *McLaurin*, and *Brown*. The yearbooks are also primary sources that we will analyze. The newspaper articles are both primary and secondary in that the writers varied from “at the time” reporting into “retrospectives” written years after the fact. This will reinforce the skill of knowing the difference and relative merits of primary vs. secondary sources.

Activities

The unit will begin with a close reading of *Brown v the Board of Education* including a summary of the cases against the Board of Regents in Oklahoma. There are many close reading strategies, but the one I find most useful in this situation is the “Reading for Meaning” from the Silver Strong and Associates group.²⁶ Students have already been introduced to *Plessey v Ferguson*, so after close reading of *Brown*, students will be create a visual map of some kind to trace the changes from 1896 to 1954, including *Sipuel* and *McLaurin*. We will probably use an online technology such as Mindmo or Prezi to do this part. Later, we will add the changes seen from the Civil Rights Acts and the *Alexander* and *Swann* cases. This can also be done in the “low tech” way by having the students create a group or whole class annotated timeline.

The next part of the unit is going to have an analysis of the differences between the integration of Little Rock Central High School and Tulsa’s Old Central. We will start with the video of *Eyes on the Prize: the Little Rock Nine*. After watching the video, students will produce some kind of writing (perhaps a quick write, journal entry or the like) to imagine themselves as students in Little Rock. We will also discuss what our Central was probably like. They will then read the newspaper accounts (interviews) with our Central’s five first black students. Perhaps at this point, depending on time, we will create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting

the two Centrals. This could also be done with a “Triple Entry Journal” or “What I thought, Now I think” activity. We will also spend a day using the yearbooks as primary source artifacts to see if we can see trends and ideas. Hopefully, the students will find trends such as the very low participation of black students in some clubs and activities. They may give me some ideas about why they think that happened and does that perceived inequality still exist today? We will be documenting trends using groups, table talk and/or large papers on the wall. I will be using “Chalk Talk” which is explained on various internet sites. I suggest Googling it.

Through this whole time the students will be working on a project/art piece that will form the illustrated Civil Rights Movement. In the hallway in front of my classroom is a very long wall, (about 90 feet). I have in the past put the dates of the Civil Rights movement starting in about 1950 - 1968. They have filled it in with posters, art, and signs to illustrate the movement. Since my school is a fine and performing arts magnet school, some of the work produced is excellent. The students will be encouraged to select events from our discovered history to post alongside national events. Once it is all displayed, students will do a gallery walk using post-its to add their thoughts to those of the artist.

At this point, the US History classes (both on-level and APUSH) will have to move to other topics in order to meet time restraints. However, the African American History class will be able to deepen their study with an oral history project. Students will interview grandparents or other relatives alive during this time (1958 - 1976), which will possibly be filmed and sound edited in a joint project with the film and studio recording students. There is also a local radio host, John Erling, who does interviews with people for an online archive called *Voices of Oklahoma*, which ironically includes a lot of Central graduates. Perhaps we will ask him to tape our students doing the interviews so they are formatted to be part of the archive. Some special emphasis will be given to the students who are mentioned in this story: Juan Dola Washington, Louis Moore, and Night Train Lane. After 1969, the Black Power and Black Panther movements grew considerably in the Tulsa area. Last year, I heard a grandparent tell her granddaughter, while looking at our illustrated timeline, that she herself had been a member of the Black Panthers. Perhaps some of our students will find that their grandparents were also participants in these or other civil rights activities.

Another project that can be done by the African American history class to really deepen their understanding and perhaps see a different point of view could come from Toni Morrison’s short story *Recitatif*. This story follows two girls from childhood to adulthood during the time of the civil rights movement and social unrest of the 60s and 70s. One is black and one is white. They choose different paths, taking them to separate worlds in economic, social and political stands, all the while showing how they interact. What makes this an excellent story is that Morrison never says which one is white and which one is black. I think this will provide a safe yet intriguing way for students to find themselves in the dialogue, without having to identify just because of race. I also think it can add some perspective to the textbook stories of what it was like to be in the civil rights movement. With my African American history students, I will probably use this story to introduce this era.

The last way of closing the circle of public history will be a walking tour. Since Old Central was closed as a public school, it has been fully renovated to be the corporate headquarters of PSO. In addition to their ties to Central through the physical building, they are also Central’s “partner in education.” This means that they sponsor scholarships for students and small grants for classroom projects. We could take a tour of Old Central. Even if we cannot make the short trip to Old Central, we can make a short tour of our Central and have discussions about the Walk of Fame, the Hall of Fame and lastly, the Appeal to Great Spirit statue. Oddly enough, when I went to Central to take the pictures found in Appendix A, I found out that most of the valuable art works that hung in the halls of Old Central are now housed at the Gilcrease Museum for their protection.

Perhaps, we can get encourage the school and museum to do a showing of that work for us and the community?

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Notes

1. Mary Lui, "History in Our Everyday Lives: Collective Memory, Historical Writing, and Public History", Seminar given at the Yale National Initiative, 2015
2. "Central High School (Tulsa, Oklahoma)" - *Wikipedia* [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_High_School_\(Tulsa,_Oklahoma\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_High_School_(Tulsa,_Oklahoma))
3. *School Profiles* The Official Website of Tulsa Public Schools.
www.tulsaschools.org/4_About_District/_documents/pdf/_school_profiles/
4. Ibid
5. (US News and World Reports 2012)"Top Oklahoma High Schools Best High Schools" 2012. usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/oklahoma Booker T has not made the top 500 list nationwide in the last few years, but it is still recognized as a Top Oklahoma School
6. *School profiles* Tulsa Public Schools. There is not one public repository of statistics to compare each school directly with the others. However, individual school pages have summaries from which a complete picture may be put together. Creating a chart to show the comparisons will be one of the extended activities for APUSH students.
7. Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939 - 1963" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (June 1993) pp. 135-167
8. Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights *School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma* 1977
9. Terrell Lester, "They Broke Colored Line at Central// Four Black Teen-Agers Entered in 1957", *Tulsa World*, February 23, 1997
10. Stefanie Lee Decker, "Luper, Clara Shepard," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, okhistory.org. It is very significant that Clara Luper did a successful lunch counter sit-in almost 4 years before CORE leaders and students started their non-violent protests in Greensboro. As a high ranking member of Oklahoma's NAACP, Clara would probably have shared

her success with Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall and the later CORE leaders.

11. "Civil Rights | OHSkids!" *Oklahoma Historical Society*" 2013. okhistory.org/kids There is some possibility that this is a memory that has been aggrandized a bit over time, as there are no other sources for independent documentation
12. "Negro Alum Concerned about Central Trouble" *Tulsa Tribune*, Nov 8, 1969
13. "Amendments and Amplifications to Tulsa Public School's Plan for Desegregation" submitted to the U.S. Commissioner of Education May 19, 1965
14. "Negro Enrollment Exceeds White at Burroughs School" *Tulsa Tribune* September 25, 1959
15. *S. v. Board of Education Independent School District No 1*, United States Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit 429 F.2d 1253 (1971)
16. *Regional Housing Study; A Housing Strategy for Stability and Balance* Indian Nations Council of Governments (1974) ,pp. 11-13.
17. John Storms, "For Outsiders at Central: Judge Vows Stiff Agitator Penalties" *Tulsa Tribune*, January 30, 1970
18. "Negro Alum Concerned" *Tulsa Tribune*.
19. "Faculty Student Council Planned at Central High School" *Tulsa Tribune*, Nov 8, 1969
20. "The Trouble at Central" *Tulsa Tribune*, January 30, 1970 Frontpage
21. Edwin Baswell and Connie Gould eds. *Tom Tom Yearbook 1970*, Central High School Tulsa
22. "Faculty Student Council" *Tulsa Tribune*.
23. Joe Gose, "With Faith of Investors Downtown Tulsa Reawakens" *New York Times*, November 11, 2014 <http://nyti.ms/1uZex0D>. We see the rapid growth of housing, restaurants and bars in the Brady and Blue Dome districts beginning to spread all directions except north, with only a few exceptions; there is still a natural boundary of the local interstate separating the downtown from the area around the new Central High School.
24. Stefanie Sposato ed. *Tom Tom Yearbook, 1975*, Central High School
25. Ibid
26. Harvey Silver et al., *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment*, Thoughtful Education Press, 2012. This has been my go-to book since the school hired Mr. Silver to come to present his "tool belt" to us. I also use the association triangle, memory box, and 4-2-1 strategies to name a few.

Appendix A

Figure 1: Photos of the first black students to enter Central High.

Source: Tom Tom Yearbook, 1958: Juan Dola Washington, Charlie Jones, Peaches Littlejohn and Louie Moore.



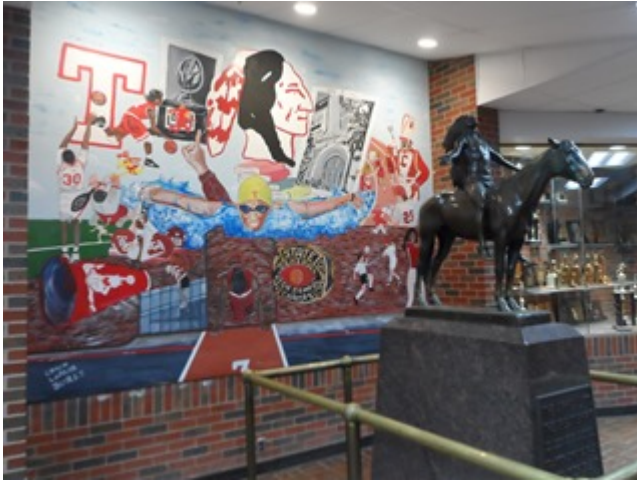
Figure 2: Chart showing increase and decrease in student populations for the Tulsa County area schools.

**Membership Report
Tulsa County Public Schools
K-12**

District	1968	1974	Gain or Loss	% of Change
Sand Springs	4,447	5,177	730	16.4%
Broken Arrow	3,633	6,141	2,508	69.0%
Owasso	1,889	2,877	988	52.3%
Jenks	1,528	3,622	2,094	137.0%
Bixby	1,378	2,321	943	68.4%
Collinsville	1,321	1,949	628	47.5%
Union	738	3,312	2,574	348.8%
Skiatook	990	1,428	438	44.2%
Sperry	636	995	359	56.4%
Berryhill	798	797	-1	-0.1%
Liberty	250	561	311	124.4%
Glenpool	270	334	64	23.7%
Keystone	147	269	122	83.0%
Mingo	162	157	-5	-3.1%
Leonard	75	105	30	40.0%
Total	18,262	30,045	11,783	64.5%
Tulsa Public	80,116	65,980	-14,136	-17.6

**Source: Paul I McCloud, Assistant to Superintendent for Research, Planning &
Development 3/26/1975**

Figure 3: Appeal to The Great Spirit Statue and School Mural



The statue seems small in size when you are used to seeing all the copies and replicas that are shown around the state in parks, museums, and other public spaces. The mural was added to the wall in 1999. This was seven years after Central High School became the Fine and Performing Arts Magnet for TPS. There are several other murals and public art works in the school that reflect our mission: stained glass replicas of the “Appeal” work, large murals of student life, and even a giant penguin that is decorated with Central memorabilia.

Figure 4: Walk of Fame at Central High School



The plaque on the left says: “The objective of the CHS “Walk of Fame” is to honor graduates with bronze plaques displaying their class numerals and the legacy of their decade at Central High School. It is the hope and dream of the Central High School alumni that this “Walk of Fame” motivates present and future classes to identify with the long line of graduates who are rooting them on to meaningful lives.” There are 11 more sets of these by year. There are also 4 extra sets of plaques that detail the history of the buildings from Indian comprehensive school to the current one.

Figure 5: Hall of Fame Central High School



In the official school foyer, we have about 60 plaques that represent “Hall of Fame” chosen by the Central Alumni Foundation. All but one of the honorees are white and from Old Central. In the top right corner of this photo is the only person of color, and the only person to be honored from a class that graduated from the New Central location. Actually, there is a huge gap in alumni in the honorees’ graduation years as there aren’t any between 1964 and 1983. The 2015 honorees are also from the early sixties. Even if the alumni committee is 40 to 50 years behind in the honorees, they could include all the students mentioned in this unit; all of them have had very successful, community service or philanthropic lives.

Appendix B

The Oklahoma State C3 Standards for Social Studies that apply to this unit are as follows:

Content Standard 5: The student will analyze foreign and domestic policies during the Cold War, 1945 to 1975

4: Cite specific textual and visual evidence to analyze the major events, personalities, tactics and effects of the Civil Rights Movement.

1. Assess the effects of President Truman’s decision to desegregate the United States armed forces, and the legal attacks on segregation by the NAACP and Thurgood Marshall, the United States Supreme Court decisions in the cases of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher and George McLaurin, and the differences between de jure and de facto segregation.
2. Compare and contrast segregation policies of “separate but equal,” disenfranchisement of African Americans through poll taxes, literacy tests, and violence; and the sustained attempts to dismantle segregation including the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the Oklahoma City lunch counter sit-ins led by Clara Luper, the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the Birmingham church bombing, the adoption of the 24th Amendment, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Selma to Montgomery marches, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
3. Compare and contrast the view points and the contributions of civil rights leaders and organizations

linking them to events of the movement including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his I have a Dream speech, Malcolm X, NAACP, SCLC, CORE, SNCC, and the tactics used at different times including civil disobedience, non-violent resistance, sit-ins, boycotts, marches and voter registration drives.

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