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Two Steps Forward: LGBTQ+ History Resources and the Obstacles They Face

The LGBTQ+ community in the late 1960s and early 1970s and advocates for LGBTQ students in the late 1990s and 2000s sought to improve life for individuals targeted for the ways in which they were different and the fear those differences inspired in others. Both prioritized creating circumstances in which the probability of mental and/or physical harm decreased before focusing on other goals. For the LGBTQ+ rights movement as a whole, that meant first seeking an end to erasure from general society, harassment in public places, and access to health care, and then turning to issues like marriage equality. Ameliorating the bullying, ostracism, and assault that LGBTQ+ students face, which in some cases deprives them of their fundamental right to education, was similarly the first step taken by organizations and advocates focused on schooling. Incorporating LGBTQ+ history, therefore, could not have been on organizations' initial agenda because this larger goal was, and is, integral to LGBTQ+ student's overall educational experience. The delayed focus on history, then, was a reflection of the immense and ongoing energy necessary to make schools safe for LGBTQ+ students.

LGBTQ+-inclusive resources that seek to improve school climate and challenge students to rethink preconceived ideas and biases serve important social studies goals and reinforce civic-oriented skills that students need as part of the school community. Where these lessons and materials reference historical events or ask students to think about the mistreatment and discrimination that LGBTQ+ individuals endured, it is imperative that they also gain a deep understanding of the myriad ways in which that population advocated for rights and recognition as well as the LGBTQ+ community's role and contributions throughout US history. Social studies aims to instill discourse and debate skills, both of which demand concrete evidence to support one's position. Inclusive history lessons, already necessary to provide students with complete, honest,

culturally sustaining portrayals of US history, are essential here, as well. These resources exist, but they need increased support from the institutions that create them and those where they might be implemented.

The University of Minnesota's Human Rights Resource Center was one of the first organizations to develop and publish LGBTQ+ history lessons for high school classes in 2000. The Resource Center's curriculum initiative, created to teach students about the rights they might "innately" know they have but with little understanding of the intricacies and implications, includes a nine-lesson unit on LGBT rights. Kristi Rudelius-Palmer, the Center's director, explained the decision to focus on LGBT rights at a time when few schools addressed this topic. She stated,

We believed that one of the most prevalent human rights violations going on in schools was against individuals identifying as LGBTQ. LGBTQ terms were also being used to degrade, bully, and discriminate against students. We probably also had the partners at the table that said, "We really should take this on," and we knew that it was one of the most challenging issues in schools, and still, unfortunately, we think is today.¹

The foundational lessons, which were written by scholar-practitioner Dave Donahue with additional organizational support of Amnesty International's Outfront Program and GLSEN, examine the process of change, laws criminalizing homosexual behaviors, and the battle for same-sex marriage;² Rudelius-Palmer claimed that she searched for similarly themed lessons created prior and discovered none.³ There was a six-year gap, then, between the commencement of LGBT History Month in 1994 and the Human Rights Resource Center's promotion of this history in schools through the creation of comprehensive, activity-based lessons with a similar goal in 2000.

Though the Human Rights Resource Center received support from local groups in St. Paul and human rights and LGBT advocacy organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Educators' Network, and GLSEN,⁴ its development of social studies lessons did not immediately lead to a widespread increase in historically focused LGBTQ resources. In the spring 2002 special issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education*, three authors examined efforts at implementing inclusive curriculum and engaging students in discussions of heteronormativity and homophobia, yet these were scholarly case studies rather than classroom-ready resources; Stephen Thornton's 2003 *Social Education* article "Silence on Gays and Lesbians in Social Studies Curriculum" lamented

this absence. LGBTQ+ students' plights received more attention, but resources available to history and social studies teachers remained rare.

Beginning in 2003, the *New York Times* Learning Network began creating and posting LGBTQ+ history lessons to its website. That year, the Learning Network, in cooperation with the Bank Street School of Education, developed lessons entitled "Family Life," "Legally Wed," and "Aesthetics of Activism: Exploring the Ways the Arts Have Responded to AIDS"; the lessons explored complex family issues, the controversy surrounding same-sex marriage, and the role of art in AIDS activism, respectively.⁵ The *Times* continued publishing lessons throughout the decade, including one that traced the evolution of gay and lesbian issues in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in December 2007, a lesson entitled "The Culture Wars" in which students stated their opinion in a letter on a specific gay rights issue of their choice in 2009, and a lesson evaluating the arguments for and against repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell in 2010.⁶ These lessons, which impart LGBTQ+ history and build literacy and discussion skills, were a significant advancement in the pursuit of inclusive history curriculum at a time when the absence of such material was more a topic for scholarly articles than educator action.

As the national conversation regarding LGBTQ rights became increasingly prominent, including debates about Don't Ask, Don't Tell, same-sex marriage, and California's Proposition 8, advocacy organizations began to devise lessons that highlighted that community's history. Anti-bullying and school climate resources remained the priority, but history and civics lessons became more available, too. GLSEN published "When Did it Happen?" in 2009; the lesson introduced students to significant moments in LGBTQ+ history in the United States dating back to colonial times. In 2010 the ADL published "The Invisibility of LGBT People in History: 'Peculiar Disposition of the Eyes'" as part of its Curriculum Connections program; the lesson asked students to consider "historically marginalized groups in society" and use that context to "increase their awareness of the ways in which LGBT people have been made invisible in history" and "learn about historically significant LGBT people, topics and events."⁷ "A Peculiar Disposition of the Eyes" names and addresses a distinct problem with the study of history in the United States and seeks to correct it; rendering a group invisible is, after all, a form of discrimination. Moreover, the idea of enhancing the visibility of important LGBTQ+ figures led activist educators to home in on historical actors whose sexuality and/or contributions to the LGBTQ+ rights movement were previously ignored, like Bayard Rustin, Frank Kameny, and Martha P. Johnson, about whom PBS Learning Media asks,

“In what ways was Johnson ahead of her time? If Johnson was still alive today, how might she be viewed by society?”⁸ These lessons were housed on organizations’ websites among materials on school climate and bullying—GLSEN, for example, has a page for educator resources but not one devoted specifically to history lessons—but their publication nevertheless offered teachers, many of whom were and are unfamiliar with this history, a mechanism through which to introduce LGBTQ+ history in their classrooms.

History UnErased, founded in 2014, is one of the few organizations singularly focused on offering comprehensive LGBTQ+ history lessons that teachers can use in class; though the organization’s founders ardently support the idea of opening people’s minds and increasing tolerance, they also believe that that goal can and should be served by the knowledge and context students glean from historical education rather than solely from lessons that seek to change the way young people interact.⁹ The Berkeley History-Social Science Project also makes lessons on LGBTQ+ history available through their website, including eleventh grade materials on the Lavender Scare and McCarthyism through which students ponder, “How did the conditions of the Cold War lead to the criminalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Americans?”¹⁰ Furthermore, Learning for Justice includes “The Role of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Civil Rights Movement,” a unit that helps students draw connections between concurrent movements, in its roster of LGBTQ+-inclusive resources.¹¹

Historical resources, then, do exist for teachers who seek them, though in less quantity than school climate resources. This echoes the institutional support both endeavors receive—fifty states have anti-bullying laws while only five have LGBTQ+ curriculum laws—and contributes to the gulf between the implementation of inclusive curriculum and historically inclusive curriculum. While the climate materials are often easily accessible to teachers regardless of their familiarity with the subject matter, historical lessons are frequently either mixed in among climate resources or require more independent research and learning.

Prioritizing History

LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, particularly that devoted to history, provides students—and, often, their teachers—with previously unknown information. Like lessons on words and bias, this, too, increases awareness and, if effective, positively impacts school climate. Learning about the past and understanding

struggles that occurred years ago can be as valuable as discussions of students' immediate environment, especially where those struggles continue to exist;¹² doing so equips students to think critically about and draw important connections between the past, the present, and the future. Thus, advocates aiming to reduce or eradicate discrimination and bias, positively change local—including school-level—and national culture, and build relationships between people and groups that struggle to coexist promote the need for a greater understanding of history.

GLSEN's "When Did It Happen: An LGBT History Lesson"¹³ was a comprehensive introductory lesson in which students discussed what they knew about LGBT history and, as a class, organized important moments in LGBT history from colonial times to the present into a timeline through interactive work and class discussion. Though the lesson provided snapshots more than in-depth analysis of LGBT history, it revealed details with which students were likely unfamiliar. Among the facts students learned were that Thomas Jefferson revised the punishment for sodomy under Virginia law and that the American Psychiatric Association voted unanimously to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders;¹⁴ it illustrated the countless ways in which discrimination and bias affected the LGBTQ+ community over time, and the ways in which that community worked to triumph over the harassment it endured. It was replaced with "LGBTQ History Timeline," a lesson that similarly asks students to organize events and figures chronologically. The learning activity, according to the overview, "allows for the sharing of these often untold stories and also facilitates a much needed discussion about the erasure of LGBTQ history in what is considered American history, and the value of critical thinking in history classes."¹⁵ The updated lesson includes Sylvia Rivera and Martha P. Johnson, transgender women who were prominent LGBTQ+ activists whose roles, like so much of this history, are too often omitted in high school classrooms.

Other lessons focus more specifically on a particular issue or event in LGBTQ+ history. Thirteen Ed Online, for example, addressed Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the role of gays in the military, contextualizing this restriction among those imposed on other groups throughout US history in a lesson entitled "Is Everyone Protected by the Bill of Rights?" This unit, published before the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, presented students with arguments on both sides of the issue in preparation for a debate. The scope of the unit begins broadly, as students consider multiple historic events, but becomes much more narrowly focused as students delve into the topic at the heart of the unit.¹⁶ The ONE Archives lesson on the AIDS crisis asks students, "Why and how did activists respond to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s?" The lesson uses media, artwork, and primary

sources to “engage [students] in the historical context of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s” and “analyze activist responses looking specifically at different goals and methods used by the activist organization ACT UP/LA.”¹⁷ These resources augment existing US history curricula and offer students the opportunity to learn about events and eras that they might not have accessed previously.

The ONE Archives, the nation’s largest repository of LGBTQ+ history documents and artifacts, began producing lessons to support the FAIR Education Act’s curriculum mandate for California schools. The lessons include selections from their primary source holdings, some of which are not available through other sites. Several of the resources focus on the LGBTQ+ rights movement, asking students to explore and evaluate the personal and political aspects of activism and the time period in which it occurred. In a lesson that asks, “How did the movement for LGBT equality go from assimilation to ‘coming out’ in the 1950s–1970s?” students review sources and mission statements from mid-twentieth-century gay rights organizations to acquire “greater understanding of the arguments, experiences and material conditions that shaped the movement.”¹⁸ “LGBTQ Civil Rights,” meanwhile, asks students to consider “how various movements for equality [built] upon one another.” This lesson, which contextualizes the struggle for LGBTQ rights within the larger atmosphere of reform and equality in the mid-late twentieth century, states in its overview, “While activists fighting for LGBT rights utilized similar tactics and had some shared goals of those fighting for Civil Rights broadly, LGBT people in racial minority communities faced additional discrimination. Moreover, many fighting for broader Civil Rights did not consider sexual preference or gender identity as a part of their fight”; students navigate these complexities to “determine to what extent the movement for LGBT rights was or was not part of the broader movement for Civil Rights of the 1970s and 1980s.”¹⁹

One event, more than any other, remains the focal point for classroom discussions of LGBTQ+ rights if the topic comes up at all—Stonewall. Teachers include a brief mention of it as they discuss the multiple concurrent movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and textbooks, if they mention LGBTQ+ history, include a few lines on the riots. In 2019, this turning point in the movement received worldwide attention in honor of its fiftieth anniversary and increased calls for its integration into US history classes. Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), PBS Learning Media, and ADL attempt to meet that need with their lessons on the Stonewall riots and their impact. SHEG’s lesson, which relies on primary source analysis, asks students to decipher “What caused the Stonewall Riots?”²⁰ PBS’s “The LGBTQ Movement and the Stonewall Riots” builds on that, as students use a cause-and-effect lens to answer the question, “How did

this event help spark a more visible LGBTQ movement?”²¹ Furthermore, ADL’s lesson, which positions Stonewall as “the beginning of the organized gay rights movement,” challenges students to “reflect on LGBTQ rights and activism prior to and after Stonewall,” query the differences between an uprising and a riot, and determine which term they would apply to Stonewall.²² These lessons, and the analysis they require, push students to move beyond basic familiarity and into deeper comprehension of the multiple perspectives on this seminal event.

Many history-based LGBTQ+ resources emphasize same-sex marriage, an issue with which most students, regardless of their politics and location, are familiar. Although some scholars warn against relying too heavily on prior knowledge and solely focusing on this issue, it is, nevertheless, a significant moment in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and present in many twenty-first-century students’ lives. The Human Rights Resource Center and Learning for Justice, for example, created lessons focused specifically on same-sex marriage. The Human Rights Resource Center’s lesson, “I Now Pronounce You ...” created after Vermont became the first state to legalize civil unions in 2000, invokes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to contextualize marriage equality within “international humanitarian standards”; it also draws parallels to the idea of separate but equal that permeated American culture and discourse for a century and asks students to apply this concept to the same-sex marriage debate.²³ Learning for Justice and ADL, in their quest to eliminate discrimination and bias, invoke other examples of past bias and injustice in their lessons on the struggle for same-sex marriage. Learning for Justice’s “Marriage Equality: Different Strategies for Attaining Equal Rights” situates the battle to legalize same-sex marriage in the “historical context of other struggles for equality,”²⁴ instructing students on constitutional rights and comparing executive, legislative, and judicial efforts on behalf of African American civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s with similar actions for marriage equality in the twenty-first century. ADL’s “Winning the Right to Marry: Historic Parallels”²⁵ uses a similar strategy; students review evolving marriage laws including Jim Crow era restrictions and the Defense of Marriage Act and “analyze existing federal and state laws concerning same-sex marriage and consider whether or not [those] laws are in need of change.”²⁶ ADL further built on this study of marriage with “Wedding Cake, Same Sex Marriage, and Discrimination,” a lesson in which students learn about *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* (2018), develop their own opinions of the case and the Court’s decision, and engage with classmates who hold different perspectives.²⁷

These lessons, which are narrower in scope than surveys of LGBTQ+ history in the twentieth century, provide students with the opportunity to explore events and issues on their own and in context, reducing the sense of “otherness” that often accompanies LGBTQ+ history.²⁸ Lessons introducing students to the big picture of LGBTQ+ history are not without merit; students’ knowledge of key events and individuals in LGBTQ+ history preceding the struggle for marriage equality undoubtedly aids their comprehension and grasp of this material. It is also important, though, for students to encounter lessons that interweave LGBT history and other topics, making it part of the curriculum rather than a separate entity. Lessons on marriage organically allow for that to happen.

The Zinn Education Project, which works to “introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula,”²⁹ includes a document on Stonewall by Martin Duberman and accompanying questions in its unit “Women, Gays, and Other Voices of Resistance,” a study of the sixties that goes beyond civil rights to examine the “general revolt in the culture against oppressive, artificial, previously unquestioned ways of living.”³⁰ In a similar vein, Facing History and Ourselves, an organization that “uses lessons of history to challenge teachers and their students to stand up to bigotry and hate,”³¹ published “LGBTQ History and Why It Matters,” a lesson that uses GLSEN’s timeline materials to “[give] students the opportunity to consider whose experiences are included in the history taught in schools, whose are often left out, and how that may reflect and perpetuate the ‘in’ groups and ‘out’ groups in our society.”³² It is imperative for students to learn LGBTQ+ history. It is also important that they understand the ramifications of omitting this, or any group, from the curriculum and learning experiences that comprise it. The Zinn Education Project and Facing History’s resources aim to begin that conversation and have students evaluate this history and the impact of its absence.

“Unheard Voices,” a collaboration between GLSEN, ADL, and StoryCorps, is one of the largest LGBTQ+ curriculum projects to date. It was published in 2011, “in response to the lack of representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in school curricula and disproportionate incidents of bullying and violence against LGBT youth ... [to] help educators to integrate LGBT history, people and issues into their instructional programs”³³ and based on oral histories conducted with “individuals who bore witness to or helped shape LGBT history in some way.”³⁴ The information from these interviews comprise the foundation of lessons exploring the AIDS epidemic, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, LGBTQ+ family rights, and the twentieth-century homophile movement, among other topics.

The lessons also include supplementary materials to support the oral histories. Unlike history curricula that study significant moments through the perspective or actions of one, usually famous, individual, “Unheard Voices” uses individuals’ experiences to make history relevant and help it resonate with students. The voices belong to “average” Americans with whom students might identify, thus decreasing the distance between students and the past they study and LGBTQ+ lifestyles in general. As historian John D’Emilio posited, a biographical approach is the optimal way to reach high school students, who learn well when they can relate to the information.³⁵ Though the lessons in “Unheard Voices” focus on specific events and issues, the curriculum as a whole is comprehensive, covering more than fifty years of history; it can thus be inserted into teachers’ taught curriculum over the course of the year and integrated among other historical topics.

Studies of individuals, a strategy also used where history is a touchstone from which thematic lessons on bias and climate emerge as well as a proven device for effectively teaching high school history, extend beyond “Unheard Voices.” Several organizations, in fact, develop curriculum focused on LGBTQ+ individuals whose historical and cultural contributions and experiences represent the struggles of this and other groups in US history. Learning for Justice’s unit “The Role of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Civil Rights Movement” includes lessons on well-known African Americans who identified as LGBTQ+ and advocated for equality on multiple fronts; PBS Learning Media’s “Understanding LGBTQ+ Identity: A Toolkit for Educators” focuses on many of the same figures. Learning for Justice’s lesson on Lorraine Hansberry, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of “A Raisin in the Sun,” asserts that she “masked radical black politics through the construction of seemingly unthreatening African American characters”³⁶ as well as advocating for women’s and LGBT rights. The lesson asks students, “What do Hansberry’s writings and life illuminate about the intersections among civil rights, women’s liberation, and the historic struggle for LGBT equality?”³⁷ as students learn about the politics and positions of a figure whose work they may have previously encountered. Similarly, through PBS Learning Media’s resources “students learn about Hansberry’s lasting impact and the intersectionality that defined her life.”³⁸ Pauli Murray, a woman with whom high school students are likely less familiar, likewise fought to end discrimination on multiple fronts. PBS shows students “how her life intertwined with the Civil Rights and Women’s Movement in the United States,”³⁹ and Learning for Justice’s lesson asks students to evaluate the obstacles she faced in the mid-twentieth century fighting “Jane and Jim Crow.”⁴⁰ “James Baldwin: Art, Sexuality, and Civil Rights” explores “how

[his] identity shaped his art and political activism. ... [and] the connections among self-identification, artistic expression, and political activism.” Learning for Justice’s lesson poses the essential question, “Why is it important that history recognize Baldwin not only as a black intellectual but also as a gay man whose ideas and artistry had an impact on politics, society, and culture?”⁴¹ PBS Learning Media, too, asks students to examine “the intersectionality that defined and influenced Baldwin’s career.”⁴² These lessons, in addition to delving into individuals’ lives and work, accentuate the connective tissues winding through history and the importance of understanding the entirety of who someone was and what they believed.

Bayard Rustin, a civil rights activist who was one of the architects of the March on Washington, was also openly gay at time when that was distinctly uncommon. Rustin is often omitted from civil rights curricula that are more focused on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s and Malcolm X’s contributions, yet his role in the movement offers students a rare, organic opportunity to see how the gay and civil rights movements overlapped and intersected. Learning for Justice offers an entire lesson dedicated to Rustin’s advocacy which seeks, among other objectives, to illustrate that “Rustin was an instrumental figure in the modern civil rights movement” and “individuals have the ability to simultaneously advocate for multiple causes, even if they conflict or overlap.”⁴³ In the essential questions, the lesson characterizes Rustin as “one of the twentieth century’s most important political organizers” as well as “a gay man involved in the civil rights movement.”⁴⁴ Rustin not only receives the recognition he deserves; teachers also have access to lessons that interweave concurrent movements, reduce the “otherness” and heteronormativity present in the majority of high school history lessons, and build important historical thinking skills.⁴⁵

LGBTQ+-inclusive historical curriculum must extend beyond the overlap between civil rights and gay rights if history curricula are to be truly inclusive. In “Alan Turing: True to Himself” GLSEN asks, “Why might it be important to learn about the various identities of historical figures?” and encourages teachers to draw comparisons between Turing’s treatment and the way in which LGBT individuals were targeted under McCarthyism.⁴⁶ PBS Learning Media’s Understanding LGBTQ+ Identities site includes lessons on We’Wha, a Zuni lhamana who “traveled to Washington, D.C. to help document Indigenous Zuni culture” amid the Native American wars of the late nineteenth century,⁴⁷ Audre Lorde, “a Black feminist lesbian poet who believed that naming our full identities was an essential part of radical social change,”⁴⁸ and Alain Locke, the Black gay writer who was “the architect of the Harlem Renaissance.”⁴⁹ Learning

about these, and other, individuals' lives, battles, and advocacy opens a door to broader historical lessons, providing students with foundational knowledge of past struggles and the means to overcome them.

History UnErased (HUE) follows this idea as well, "bringing LGBTQ history into the mainstream curriculum" and "promoting genuine understanding and equality for all LGBTQ people."⁵⁰ HUE's lessons situate LGBTQ+ history within topics studied in classrooms throughout the nation; their "Intersections and Connections" curriculum "broadens history and the social sciences from Jamestown through the 21st century" and "ensures LGBTQ and all minorities are represented within a more complete, complex, and empowering story of America."⁵¹ Their resources, which examine individuals' lives and significant events and eras in LGBTQ history, challenge students to rethink their ideas about US history and embrace figures like Jane Addams, Gladys Bentley, and Tom Cassidy in new ways. Miriam Morgenstern, one of HUE's founders, posited, "Children need to see themselves and their families reflected in the academic content in a classroom, but LGBTQ+ history, topics and people have been excluded from the curricula. We can't expect teachers to 'just do it.' They need resources and training to bring this erased content into their classrooms."⁵² The curriculum and content produced by HUE, then, strives to undo this trend in a way that allows for the seamless inclusion of LGBTQ+ history in classrooms.

As encapsulated by Morgenstern, organizations developing LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula have similar goals, even when their tactics or semantics differ. LGBTQ+ students must feel safe and have positive associations with school if they are to learn, and, furthermore, they cannot be invisible in the resources and materials their teachers disseminate. US history classes may not be the place where students will consider and process the impact of their language and behavior on a regular basis, but it is where similar examples from the past, albeit often on a larger scale, will illustrate the same principles. Learning this history, then, is crucial to students' understanding and analysis of the past; the content and analysis it provokes serve a similar purpose to students' relationship with the present fulfilling a wide range of missions and objectives.

The lessons and units available online reflect advancing ideas on how to integrate omitted aspects of history into the classroom. They provide educators with packaged, well-researched lessons and resources on a topic with which many teachers are unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable. The lessons offered by PBS Learning Media, Learning for Justice, the ADL, and others are a remarkable entry point from which to begin introducing this history to a new generation of students. Furthermore, incorporating new material into the curriculum is a long

and fraught process.⁵³ These lessons, even where they are too narrowly focused or excessively broad, exist as a starting point from which future curricula can grow. Though the disparate nature of these resources is potentially problematic in that it requires teachers to hunt for what they need, the materials and lessons indicate the increasing inclination to teach LGBTQ+ history and the work that goes into doing so.

The resources available to teachers offer high-quality options for making those wishing to make their classes more representative. Truly inclusive history curricula, though, require greater diversity of resources than what is currently available to the majority of teachers. Although some topics, like same-sex marriage and the Stonewall riots, are more accessible to students and therefore more viable as lessons, multiple organizations developing lessons on the same topics prevent the creation of resources on equally important topics like the Harlem Renaissance and the Second World War, time periods covered in US history classes that allow for organic integration of LGBTQ+ content. Furthermore, though there are clear connections between social reform movements, the cluster of lessons aligning the civil rights and gay rights movements do not meet educators' calls for materials that interweave LGBTQ+ history throughout US history. The similarities among resources available, though illustrative of the need for lessons on those topics, preclude broader historical learning. ONE Archives and PBS Learning Media intend to address these needs, but this lack of diversity prevents LGBTQ+ history from being implemented in US history classes as thoroughly as educators and scholars suggest it should and as well as the number of available resources indicate that it could be.

In 2015, Carolyn Laub insisted that historically based curricula aiming to make LGBTQ+ individuals and events more visible must be distinct from anti-bullying and diversity lessons. She posited, "We're going to change what we are teaching and the way that we're teaching it so that LGBT Americans and their struggles and their stories are told in history. That is just so different than teaching about diversity, bias, or bullying [but] there hasn't really been a hunger for anyone to develop LGBT history lesson plans comprehensively."⁵⁴ Changes in the last five years met Laub's call, but this reform must persist. Marginalized groups are present throughout US history, and it benefits students for inclusive curriculum to encompass them all. Since GLSEN's founding in 1990 and as more organizations began creating LGBTQ+-inclusive resources, the majority targeted bullying and school climate. These topics seemed more societally acceptable and more imminently necessary, especially as national attention to bullying skyrocketed. In the twenty-first century, though, as LGBTQ+ issues

have become and remain national news, organizations are rising to the challenge Laub addressed and developing resources that, to varying extents, invoke and convey this history. This recognition, and the work it spurs, are necessary and valuable steps for real change to happen.

One Step Back?

Kisha Webster, a former director of education and community engagement at Welcoming Schools, asserted that the most significant obstacles to taking these resources from the screen to the classroom are lack of administrative support and teachers' unfamiliarity with the material. She stated, schools "need to make sure that they have policies in place and resources associated with truly preparing educators to do this well"; she emphasized that LGBTQ+ history must be integrated properly, or it risks becoming insufficient and redundant.⁵⁵ Regardless of the number of available resources, without systemic support the materials will be used by a small cadre of individual educators rather than becoming an integral aspect of a US history survey course. Where ignorance and resistance abound, then, it is imperative to have accessible resources and information to thwart it. All of the organizations developing curriculum share this goal.

In order to incorporate new curricula in a major academic subject area in the current educational climate, it must align with state and national standards; any materials that do not explicitly comply have little chance of being used. In states where LGBTQ+ history is absent from standards, a significant obstacle considering the amount of material to be covered in ten months, resources must at least align with Common Core standards to be viable. Several organizations, therefore, prioritize compliance in an attempt to make their resources more acceptable and marketable; these organizations explicitly state their alignment with standards throughout their materials. Project Look Sharp's Sox Sperry underscored the importance of alignment, stating, "One of the most frequently visited parts of our website is the index for lessons around Common Core ... because a lot of teachers these days are being required to teach to tests that are tied to [those] standards."⁵⁶ Furthermore, ONE Archives includes Common Core and state standards as well as relevant sections of California's History and Social Science Framework in all of its materials. Learning for Justice's lessons reference the numbers of the Common Core standards addressed in each lesson at the end, and ADL is explicit about which standards each of its lessons meets. Jinnie

Spiegler, ADL's curriculum director, claimed, "Our lessons are always Common-Core aligned, have a social justice and anti-bias lens and include activities that are interactive."⁵⁷ Each of these organizations aims to create materials that appeal nationally and thus focus on aligning with Common Core over navigating fifty different, potentially contradictory, sets of standards.

The lack of requirements across the country to teach LGBTQ+ history is an oft-cited reason for its absence from classrooms and, therefore, stymies the use of available resources regardless of their purpose or content. Six states mandate teaching LGBTQ+ history. Where there is no mention, the chances that teachers will seek to incorporate this material significantly decrease. Aligning with Common Core and other national standards is essential, but it does not carry the gravitas of being entrenched in the state standards on which students are tested. This lack of institutional support detracts from the work that outside organizations do to develop materials by restricting teachers' opportunities to explore its impact in their classes. Despite education advocates' and developers' best efforts, bureaucratic restrictions pose significant hurdles to implementing LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum in standards-based classes. LGBTQ+ history lessons, despite their value, depend on support beyond the academy and organizations that create and promote them.

As of 2021, five states (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas) have laws banning positive representations of LGBTQ+ individuals and issues in school settings. "No Promotion of Homosexuality"⁵⁸ legislation, referred to by LGBTQ+ rights advocates as "No Promo Homo" laws, "expressly forbid teachers from discussing gay and transgender issues (including sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness) in a positive light—if at all."⁵⁹ These laws date back to the 1970s and John Briggs's efforts to ban LGBTQ content and teachers from public schools; they remain good law in the twenty-first century.

Unlike states that omit LGBTQ+ history from their standards, "No Promo Homo" laws codify restrictions on inclusive curriculum. The Alabama State Code, for example, declares,

Any program or curriculum in the public schools in Alabama that includes sex education ... shall, as a minimum, include and emphasize the following ... An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.⁶⁰

Similarly, Texas law states that educational materials must "state that homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense."⁶¹ These laws, as well as those on the books in other states, circumvent any discussion of how

to introduce LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum by legally restricting the topic as a whole. Although specifically targeted to health and sex education classes, they are indicative of school culture and can be more widely applied. As recently as 2012, Tennessee and Missouri attempted to pass laws prohibiting any discussion or mention of homosexuality within school buildings, a bill thrice introduced in the Tennessee state legislature; both bills failed despite widespread conservative support due to the perceived homophobia attached to them.⁶² In forty-five states, amending standards to include LGBTQ+ history is a necessary step to guarantee its place in taught curriculum. In the five states with “No Promotion of Homosexuality” legislation, the stumbling blocks are exponentially more significant.

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LGBTQ+ history resources exist to a greater extent than ever before and educational and advocacy organizations develop new materials all the time. This helps overcome teachers’ knowledge gaps and inexperience with this topic and offers students opportunities that they didn’t have before. Educators and educational institutions now need to move past existing hurdles so these resources can be implemented. In Emily Hobson’s opinion,

everything that has kept LGBT history at somewhat of a fringe can be a way to introduce good historical method that then can be a pathway for students, who just think more critically about the past in general, think more critically about their learning in general, get excited about new areas, see the value ... political engagement, maybe get interested in teaching history because they don’t have to just talk about World War II and the Cold War.⁶³

Technical barriers like standards and testing, and societal and moral impediments, like the association of LGBTQ+ issues and sex,⁶⁴ have long posed obstacles to discussions of LGBTQ+ history in classrooms. Change is afoot, though. There is more attention now on the lack of LGBTQ+ history in public schools, the need for resources to teach it, and for those resources to be inquiry and/or project-based. History lessons, and the intention to teach them, remain grassroots. They require the same systemic backing that anti-bullying efforts receive in order to become similarly widespread, but the increasing number and quality of resources available indicate that Hobson’s vision can become a reality.