Berman, Stacie Brensilver. "Conclusion: The Future of LGBTQ+ History Instruction." *LGBTQ+ History in High School Classes in the United States since 1990*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 173–178. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350177352-010>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 10:16 UTC.

Copyright © Stacie Brensilver Berman 2022. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Conclusion: The Future of LGBTQ+ History Instruction

When I began this research eight years ago, the landscape for LGBTQ+-inclusive history education was much different. Fewer resources were available online; there was far less attention paid to the presence of this material in classrooms. The FAIR Education Act had passed, but its implementation prospects seemed distant. Teachers in liberal regions were far more defensive about including this material in their classrooms; a teacher whom I asked about a resource she used in class was reticent to discuss it until I explained my work. Keeping up with the changes that occurred as I researched was daunting at times but also indicative of what happens as a movement seeking to create change takes hold. The future of this enterprise, then, is brighter now than it was less than a decade ago.

The African American Civil Rights Movement and the women's rights movement did not appear in US history curricula as they occurred or in their immediate aftermath; they remain underrepresented in many states' standards and classroom instruction today despite the fact that the civil rights movement itself focused on schooling and advocated for the inclusion of Black history. The push to include these major historical moments encountered significant resistance, especially in the South where "mint julep" versions of textbooks omitted the civil rights movement even as northern schools began learning about it.¹ Advocates for incorporating LGBTQ+ history similarly navigate the controversy engendered by curricular reforms as well as confronting the decades-long debates over sex education which, unlike civil rights and women's rights, involves and potentially offends individuals' religious beliefs. Advocates for LGBTQ+ inclusive history classes and resources insist that this topic is purely historical; the opposition is highly motivated to prevent its appearance in history classes, conflating it with the studies of sexuality and sex education that they stand vehemently against. Fully grasping the struggle to integrate LGBTQ+ history, then, requires understanding arguments in favor of inclusion as well as

the opposition this movement faces relative to other historical topics and the additional sources of resistance with which it must contend.

The movement to include LGBTQ+ history is both top-down and bottom-up; change has, and must, come from both directions. Legislation and framework revisions must be implemented by teachers if they are to have a real impact; administrative and governmental support is necessary bolster teachers' inclination to incorporate LGBTQ+ history. The areas in which progress has been made illustrate the potential effects of both this partnership and the different entities encompassed within it; the way in which obstacles persist show their limitations.

Classroom change does not happen without teachers who are willing to implement it. As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, more teachers are interested in and/or willing to introduce LGBTQ+ history to their students than in the past. Though it was difficult to find teachers who engaged in this practice five years ago, in the intervening years more teachers began including LGBTQ+ history; some who already incorporated it became more open to speaking about their practices than they were in the past.² In 2014, less than twenty people attended the NCSS session on the *How to Survive a Plague* unit; in 2017, more than thirty attendees at the same conference signed in and engaged in extended conversations at a poster presentation on teachers' efforts to include LGBTQ+ history in their classrooms.³ A roundtable discussion at the American Historical Association (AHA) in 2018 entitled "Words that Shape the World: Historians, Teachers, and Partnerships for LGBT History" was similarly well attended, with teachers sharing their experiences teaching this material and inquiring about extending their practice. In 2019, the Committee on LGBT History awarded the first biyearly Don Romesburg Prize, named for the Sonoma State scholar who spearheaded efforts to change California's Framework, to Rachel Reinhard and Bay Area educator Emily Richards of UC Berkeley's History-Social Science Project for its lesson on the Lavender Scare. The prize recognizes K–12 teachers who present and investigate "intersectional and research-driven LGBT history content" with their students;⁴ such an award would be neither possible nor necessary without a pool of teachers committed to and immersed in this work. State governments and Departments of Education, then, are not alone in reconsidering the role of LGBTQ+ history in social studies classrooms; change is happening concurrently among teachers with the motivation and ability to create more inclusive learning experiences.

Beyond government and classroom-centered movements for change, discussions of LGBTQ+ history's place in social studies classes have become

more prominent in the media. In an era of sound bites and “listicles,” increased coverage of this topic in the popular press clearly indicates that it is an issue about which people outside educational circles are thinking; the speed with which information is shared also means that these articles reach a broad audience relatively quickly. In October 2017, for example, *U.S. News and World Report* published “Don’t Overlook LGBTQ+ History in High School” in which author Alexandra Pannoni claimed, “There is a burgeoning movement to cover the contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals in public schools.”⁵ Pannoni went on to offer suggestions to teachers interested in incorporating LGBTQ+ history based on the advice of one California teacher already doing so. Tris Mamone published “I Wish I Had Learned LGBTQ+ History in High School” on HuffPost, a website that previously posted similarly themed articles, in 2018. Writing in response to Illinois’s then-proposed LGBTQ+ history bill, Mamone asserted, “LGBTQ+ people have existed throughout history and made tremendous contributions to American culture, yet no one talked about them in school ... If I had known about them, I might not have suffered through years of alienation, confusion and self-hatred.”⁶ More recently, *Time* magazine’s 2019 article “As More States Require Schools to Teach LGBTQ History, Resources for Teachers Expand” discussed increased attention to inclusive classroom resources.⁷ Teachers’ efforts and advocacy for change in schools and the halls of government, then, garner greater and more positive attention than in the past. Reform is afoot and the media has taken notice; change, and conversations referencing it, have long been and continue to be indicators of progress.

The possibilities that exist in some parts of the country, however, are not present in other states and regions. Though in a positive step three states—Utah (2017), Arizona (2019), and South Carolina (2020)—recently repealed or overturned their “No Promo Homo” laws, five states maintain them; if anything, the movement toward inclusive curriculum in other parts of the country strengthened these states’ resolve to prohibit discussions of LGBTQ+ history, issues, and lifestyles in their schools.⁸ Similar atmospheres and thought processes are evident in conservative regions outside these five states, as well. Evangelical opposition to LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum continues to thrive in these areas, as well as in states that passed and are moving to implement curriculum laws; it often increases in proportion to the success advocates experience. A spokesperson for Focus on the Family, one of the organizations most vehemently opposed to the presence of LGBTQ+ issues in schools, told NBC News, “Policies should offer both across-the-board protection for every student, as well as respect for

the fact that parents have the most intimate knowledge of their children, and therefore, should have the power to decide when, if and how their kids are introduced to controversial sexual topics.”⁹ Furthermore, this opposition is far better funded than the state mandates calling for integrating LGBTQ+ history and the individual teachers doing so, a factor Don Romesburg emphasized in discussing his concerns about the FAIR Act’s future, especially when the funding attached to the Framework revisions expires.¹⁰ Thus, though the movement to introduce LGBTQ+ history in US history classes has gained traction in more liberal parts of the country it is entirely possible that there are limits to the extent of this progress. This does not detract from the movement’s success, but it suggests that nationwide change might currently be an unrealistic goal.

The most prevalent impediment to change on this front is the aforementioned absence of LGBTQ+ history from state standards and the tests generated to assess students’ facility with the information therein. Despite educators’ and scholars’ arguments against the need for and the dependence on standards and testing, their place in education and their influence over schooling have not wavered. While this poses an obstacle, then, it is also a source of promise. California’s FAIR Education Act, despite the struggle to implement it on a widespread basis, remains a significant victory in the fight to incorporate LGBTQ+ history in US history classes, as do similar laws in New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, Illinois, and Nevada and the framework revision in Massachusetts. They proved that such legislation was possible, especially in states with Democratic legislative majorities. Additionally, the diligence and tenacity of the scholars and educators who worked to change California’s Framework and create resources in other states and counties serve as an example to additional states that might be similarly inclined. Where standards are among the most significant obstacles to incorporating LGBTQ+ history, amending them is a meaningful step toward more inclusive curriculum. Though top-down actions do not lead to immediate change, they lay important groundwork for continued progress. The most meaningful obstacle, then, is also the one with the most realistic chance to become an opportunity. As the FAIR Education Act was the domino leading to change in New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, Illinois, and Nevada, so too might changes in six states lead others to amend their guidelines for student learning.

The movement to incorporate LGBTQ+ history in high school US history classes is therefore on the precipice of real success. Teachers and advocates have established a foundation from which these reforms can grow and a trajectory marked by slow and steady progress from top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Increased attention to these reform efforts, greater awareness of advocates’

accomplishments and the continuing need for change, and sustained discussion of inclusive curriculum in the public forum have the potential to build upon the success generated by existing efforts. Nationwide change might not be feasible, but the increasing curricular prominence of a subject rarely spoken of in society thirty years ago represents progress nonetheless.

LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum has expanded beyond the handful of US history classrooms in which it was present five or ten years ago. Additional reforms and greater support are necessary if it is to become an entrenched aspect of US history classrooms. In 2019, NCSS issued “Contextualizing LGBT+ History within the Social Studies Curriculum,” a position statement that “asserts that contextualizing LGBT+ history within the story of America through an inquiry-based, non-judgmental critical analysis of primary sources is a reflection of what unifies caretakers of the social studies, irrespective of their political affiliations or ideologies”; the statement urged educators to ponder how they might create “more accurate and empowering curriculum.”¹¹ This stance, from an organization that counts thousands of social studies teachers among its members, is the type of institutional support necessary to propel this movement forward. Political and educational LGBTQ+ activist organizations must make curricular change a priority to counter a focused, well-funded opposition. There will always be individual teachers who, believing a topic is important, work to ensure its inclusion and/or prominence in their classroom. These teachers are the grassroots of this movement and they are essential, but they cannot grow it on their own. Standards and institutional support—within and outside the educational arena—are vital to continued and increasing progress, especially considering the obstacles that will remain steadfast.

As battles for equality, recognition, and access persist in the United States, it remains essential for students to understand the history of those struggles in order to comprehend the problems and divisions facing the nation today. Education, in fact, encompasses the transmission of culture among generations and occurs in an array of forums including the home, religious institutions, voluntary organizations, social circles, the media, and society at large. High school students do not solely rely on class discussions for the knowledge and ideas they acquire, but these conversations and the way in which information is conveyed in school, as versus other settings, broadens and contextualizes how students comprehend LGBTQ+ history and the issues facing the population today.

Renewed emphasis on the plight of marginalized groups in this country began prior to the 2016 election; it has intensified since and reached new levels in the

spring and summer of 2020. In March 2021, President Biden issued an executive order directing the Secretary of Education to review and enforce regulations “guarantee[ing] an educational environment free from ... discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.”¹² Incorporating LGBTQ+ history as that population continues to navigate questions about rights and representation serves the mission of social studies and connects the classroom and the world outside of it in a way that prepares students to engage in difficult conversations in meaningful ways. Moreover, this history’s omission from US history classes becomes less viable as LGBTQ+ rights and debates pertaining to them remain part of the national conversation; teachers, school districts, and departments of education cannot legitimately claim to educate students in this discipline and foster participatory citizenship while leaving out a central aspect of the nation’s narrative. Though history and social studies receive less attention among educational policy makers in the twenty-first century than literacy and math, within the classroom it remains imperative for the subject to fulfill its mission.

When Kevin Jennings established the organization that became GLSEN in 1990, he hoped that he might be able to support LGBT teachers struggling with their identity and their sense of belonging in school communities where they felt compelled to hide their true selves. Nearly thirty years later, GLSEN is the single largest organization supporting LGBTQ+ students and teachers and providing curriculum and professional development to schools around the country. Its research is published and cited in the academic and popular press, and its advocacy efforts have made schools more welcoming and curriculum more inclusive for thousands of students. GLSEN today exists far beyond the scope of anything its founders could have imagined. The movement to integrate LGBTQ+ history into US history classrooms has similarly, but so far on a smaller scale, come farther than advocates ever thought possible. It has farther to go still and realities and obstacles with which to contend, but it also has a strong foundation of its own and powerful role models to follow. In the places where progress is possible, then, continued efforts and the passage of time indicate it can be accomplished. The fight, as Lyndsey Schlax declared, however prolonged, is worth it.