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'A Movement Reconsidered'

An examination of how Black Civil Rights in the USA, 1954–1970 has been taught as a senior subject in New Zealand secondary schools, and whether or not it accurately reflects contemporary scholarship and new trends of interpretation.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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2013
Abstract

This thesis examines how Black Civil Rights (BCR)\(^1\) in the USA, 1954–1970 has been taught as a senior subject in New Zealand secondary schools since its introduction into the New Zealand History curriculum in 1988. It provides a historical perspective on the political, economic, and social context in which the National History Curriculum Committee (NHCC) made the decision to introduce this topic into the Form 5 (now Year 11) History curriculum. It is also concerned with whether the conceptions of Black Civil Rights history from 1988 to the present (2013), reflects contemporary scholarship and new trends of interpretation.

This thesis argues that the continued reliance on a classical/master-narrative approach to the teaching and learning of BCR in the USA, 1954–1970, reflects a historiography that is frozen in time. The result is that teachers are disseminating a conception of BCR history that is politically slanted, conservative, and Eurocentric. It is an approach that perpetuates the myth that there is inevitability about America’s progressive history; that its lofty notions of democracy, justice, and the equality of all people, will in the end triumph.

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\(^{1}\) The New Zealand History curriculum calls this topic, Black Civil Rights (BCR). It is more historically accurate to use the term, as Black leaders during the period did, the ‘Freedom Movement.’ I retain the use of BCR and later Civil Rights Movement (CRM) because it is the term used in New Zealand. In my teaching I encourage to use the more accurate term, ‘Freedom Movement.’
Furthermore, this thesis contends that as one of the two most popular Year 11 History topics, this selective, sanitized approach to teaching BCR deprives students the opportunity to understand that historiography is subject to change, that historical events are open to interpretation, and that history as it is written is not always history as it was. As an alternative, this thesis advocates a counter-narrative approach that draws on recent scholarship and new trends of interpretation.

I acknowledge the Massey University Ethics Committee who approved this research on 28 June 2012 as a Low Risk Notification.²

² Please see Appendix A for documentation.
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Glossary

AS ................................................................. Achievement Standard

AO ................................................................. Achievement Objective

AHTA .......................................................... Auckland History Teachers’ Association

BCR .................................................................. Black Civil Rights

CDD ................................................................. Curriculum Development Division

F5/F6/F7 .......................................................... Forms 5, 6, 7

HOD ................................................................. Head of Department

MOE ................................................................. Ministry of Education

NCEA ........................................................... National Certificate in Educational Achievement

NHC ................................................................. National History Curriculum

NHCC ............................................................ National History Curriculum Committee

NZCF ............................................................ New Zealand Curriculum Framework

NZHA ............................................................ New Zealand History Association

NZQA ............................................................ New Zealand Qualifications Authority

WAHTA ........................................................ Wellington Area History Teachers’ Association