



“Own Your History:” Calumny and Community in American LGBTQ+ Experience

NCSS, November 23, 2019

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Own Your History® - A Different Approach To Our History.

For the last five years my passion has been to develop innovative and compelling education programs that engage and inspire young people— the “Own Your History” Leadership Course (OYHL) for schools and the Own It! after school program.

We have inherited a country with deep divisions rooted in our past. We do not share a common understanding of American history. Divided over a past we cannot change, we find it hard to work together.

OYHL is different because it combines the history we all need to know with a focus on creating a greater future. OYHL develops more aware, productive

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citizens who “own” our history and are ready to work to achieve the American promise of justice, inclusion, and equal opportunity for all in a diverse society. It prepares students to claim their power to transform their lives and their communities .

Our OYH modules are now fully aligned with California public school standards and requirements. We have signed a formal agreement with the country’s second largest school district, the Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles Unified). Under this agreement, the OYHL modules are now “curriculum for use by [Los Angeles Unified] Teachers in their classes or other educational activities or programs.” The complete OYH lesson plans will be “accessible online and otherwise for use by all” Los Angeles Unified instructors and other authorized personnel.

Each OYHL module is a teacher-ready, multi-day lesson plan that is in-depth and includes:

- Extensive use of primary sources, with assessment and analysis
- Essential documents, with links for additional research
- Inquiry-based approach
- Active learning, including debates, role play, advocacy
- Expression and writing skills
- Civic engagement
- A culminating activity
- Plus Extension Activities providing additional learning options

OYHL leads to ownership of a deeper understanding of both American greatness and our struggles with inequality, xenophobia, poverty, discrimination and injustice based on color [“race”], gender, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ status.

OYHL rests on three pillars. First, it makes history personal and helps develop empathy. Second each module links the past to the present. Finally, the modules include activities to develop student leadership skills, civic engagement, and vision for a greater future. It empowers students to create a more just future and seek reconciliation in their unique ways.

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Available OYHL modules:

- Inheritances: American stories and Connecting to History
- A Nation of Immigrants: Past, Present, Future
- American Women (1848 – Present): Ownership, Leadership and Rights
- LGBTQ+ Americans: The Experience of Difference
- American Apartheid: Housing Segregation Outside the South (1920-Present)
- Civil Rights in the New Deal
- Civil Rights Leadership in the 1960s
- Cesar Chavez: A Latino Leader for Migrant Rights

A brief description of each module is at our UPDATED WEBSITE: <http://www.ownyourhistory.us/>

Complete modules are available at NO COST.
For copies contact: reager@ownyourhistory.us

“Own Your History:” Calumny and Community in American LGBTQ+ Experience

This five-class module introduces high school students to American LGBTQ+ history. By highlighting the LGBTQ+ **experience** for the last hundred years, we hope they will develop both understanding and greater empathy.

1. Background:

The experience of LGBTQ+ persons in the United States has been substantially shaped by a number of factors: religion, law, science and medicine, and the reality of both same-sex attraction among a significant minority and variations in gender identity. Historically, homosexual conduct was never accepted, but most often was quietly tolerated.

Laws punishing “sodomy” were common from the colonial period, but rarely enforced, even though religious and social norms would condemn all such acts. Only flagrant public sexual conduct or sexual acts combined with violence might be prosecuted.

Prior to the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, laws and social norms involving sex focused on supporting reproduction. Non-procreational sex was seen as abnormal. Same-sex relationships did occur, and were frowned upon by colonial and early republic society.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, however, scientific study and medical views contributed significantly to a fundamental change, the creation of a new category of human beings—“homosexuals.” (It may be noted that in the nineteenth century, scientists also propounded pseudo-scientific conclusions about a hierarchy of humans based on the construct of “race.”) The creation of the category of “homosexuals” had far-reaching consequences as medical, legal, and religious forces began to focus on this allegedly distinct minority of persons.

The interplay of science, religion, and law created a new environment for homosexuals in the US. The new laws that made homosexuality illegal also changed the way society saw homosexuals and how homosexuals saw themselves. It contributed to a climate of fear and greater secrecy and reinforced the need to be “in the closet” even with friends and family. In many cases, “difference” became part of their day-to-day life.

2. Brief review of highlights of key LGBTQ+ events and milestones since 1950:

After World War II, negative attitudes and discrimination against homosexuals reached an unprecedented intensity. Being “in the closet” and hiding gay sexuality was the

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norm. The last sixty years, however, have witnessed dramatic changes in the legal status and rights and experience of LGBTQ+ persons in the United States—although full equality has yet to be achieved. For example, it is still possible for an LGBTQ+ person to be fired from a job because of not being “straight.”

- **The Professor’s Trial:** the 1960 arrest and trial of a respected professor for possession of “lewd” magazines as part of the anti-homosexual Lavender Scare of the 1950s;
- **Stonewall:** the 1969 uprising by LGBTQ+ persons against the NY City police at the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village in New York City;
- **DSM:** The 1974 change in the medical characterization of homosexuality, in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which since 1952 had characterized homosexuality as a “sociopathic personality disturbance”;
- **Billie Jean King:** The “outing” of Billie Jean King in 1981 and her later leadership in sports and the LGBTQ+ community;
- **LGBTQ+ Activism:** Mattachine Society; Daughters of Bilitis; Gay Liberation Front; Gay Activists Alliance.
- **Political Presence:** Harvey Milk, Elaine Noble, Barney Frank, Tammy Baldwin;
- **LGBTQ+ Rights generally:** Court cases involving free speech, job discrimination, deportation, Boy Scout participation, constitutionality of sodomy statutes in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)
- **LGBTQ+ Civil Rights:** Court cases regarding marriage equality, government benefits, wedding cake;
- **Transgender Rights:** Court cases regarding sex discrimination, hiring, firing, working conditions (including bathroom access)
- **Transgender Visibility:** Christine Jorgensen, Chaz Bono, Caitlyn Jenner.

Supporting Questions:

1. What were the experiences of members of the LGBTQ+ community in the last half of the 20th century? As much as possible, try to consider this experience in personal terms and with empathy: how might LGBTQ+ persons have felt because of this experience? How do you think those experiences are the same or different from the LGBTQ+ community experiences today?
2. What were some of the rights (both legally and in terms of human dignity) the LGBTQ+ community was seeking?
3. What rights have been gained?
4. What rights might the LGBTQ+ community still be seeking to gain?

3. The principal activity in the session involves taking informed action:

- 10 minutes: Form small groups—each group identifies a form of ongoing discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons, using materials in session handout and online as time permits, in an area such as: adoption, housing, healthcare, employment, hate crimes, youth mental health.

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- 15 minutes: each group outlines a legislative proposal addressing their identified discrimination and develops arguments in support, with connections to prior civil rights examples.
- 20 minutes: each group briefly presents its proposals and supporting arguments.
- 5 minutes: reflection and wrap-up

Background: Since the 2015 decision legalizing same sex marriage, activists have struggled to inform the public that LGBTQ+ Americans still face many forms of legal discrimination, and the extent of discrimination against transgender persons. As the following articles demonstrate, many states continue to restrict the rights of non-hetero or trans individuals by prohibiting them from adopting or fostering children, denying them equal medical services, or by allowing businesses to discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation. In several states, teachers are required either to say nothing about sexual orientation, or to privilege hetero sexuality. At the federal level, the Trump administration has already rolled back Obama-era protections for bathroom usage and employment protections for non-conforming adults. It is important that we all recognize that despite important advancements over the last decade, there are still many legal risks, continuing discrimination, and roadblocks to full equality.

Note: For purposes of this activity, the term “LGBTQ+ community” includes transgender persons and discrimination against them.

Supporting Questions:

1. Historically, why has there been discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community?
2. Why have equal rights and human dignity been denied?
3. How important are laws for ensuring human dignity?
4. What barriers still exist today, especially for trans and non-conforming persons?
5. How can we, as a society, move forward to insure equal rights and human dignity for everyone?

Taking informed action: legislation to expand LGBTQ+ rights

1. While cases such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* gave same-sex couples the right to marry in the United States, some states still restrict the rights of non-hetero or trans individuals by prohibiting them from adopting or fostering children, denying them equal medical services, or by allowing businesses to refuse services because of identity or orientation.
2. Working in groups, identify an issue and research as time permits.
 - i. Adoption
 - ii. Housing
 - iii. Healthcare (including healthcare decisions about partners)

- iv. Employment
- v. Physical safety (including hate crimes)
- vi. Mental health for minors (the risks of suicide due to bullying, ostracization, conversion therapy, and the lack of legislation protecting LGBTQ+ youth)

Materials

- [Handout: Current Legal Status of the LGBTQ+ Community and Proposed Legislation](#)
- [How to Draft a Bill:](#)
https://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org/uploads/8/8/4/0/8840743/legislative_process_how_to_draft_a_bill.pdf
- Research websites:
 - Websites covering wide range of issues, including jobs, housing and healthcare, updated:
 - ACLU, Legal developments affecting LGBTQ+ rights, updated weekly: <https://www.aclu.org/legislation-affecting-lgbt-rights-across-country>
 - United States: State Laws Threaten LGBT Equality | Human Rights Watch, focus on religious exemptions:
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/19/united-states-state-laws-threaten-lgbt-equality>
 - State-by-state summaries:
<https://www.freedomforallamericans.org/states/>
 - Lambda Legal website on anti-LGBTQ+ legal developments,
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/issues/anti-lgbt-rulings-laws-and-amendments> and <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/legal-docs>
 - Employment discrimination:
<https://www.lambdalegal.org/issues/employment-and-rights-in-the-workplace>
 - Health care discrimination: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/issues/health-care-fairness>
 - Housing discrimination: <https://victoryinstitute.org/lgbtq-housing-discrimination/> ;
 - Website with maps showing state law affecting LGBTQ+ persons on a range of issues: http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws
 - Anti-gay curriculum laws
 - - Columbia Law Review [2018]
<https://columbialawreview.org/content/anti-gay-curriculum-laws/>
 - #DontEraseUs: FAQ About Anti-LGBT Curriculum Laws | Lambda Legal, <https://www.lambdalegal.org/dont-erase-us/faq>

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- Articles addressing other issues
 - Seven Anti-LGBT Laws That Remain on Texas' Books, <https://www.texasobserver.org/seven-anti-lgbt-laws-that-remain-on-texas-books/>
 - Trump administration dismantles LGBT-friendly policies – POLITICO, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/19/trump-lgbt-rights-discrimination-353774>
 - Federal Appeals Court Finds Anti-Gay Workplace Discrimination Is Illegal – Mother Jones, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/02/federal-appeals-court-finds-anti-gay-workplace-discrimination-is-illegal/>
 - State Sodomy Laws Continue To Target LGBT Americans | Equality Matters, <http://equalitymatters.org/blog/201108080012>

Handout: Current Legal Status of the LGBTQ+ or Transgender Persons and Proposed Legislation

- Using the websites provided your group will research various state or federal laws that now still discriminate against LGBTQ+ persons.
- Your group will determine a legislative change that would provide legal protection for LGBTQ+ persons in the area identified. Use the template below to outline your proposed law.
- Develop Talking Points to persuade lawmakers and the public generally that the proposed law will end current unfair discrimination and be good for LGBTQ+ persons and society generally.

Part A: Current Legal Status

Issue:	
Existing discriminatory law:	
Sources (websites):	
Why is this law discriminatory?	

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Part B: Proposed Legislation

Definition	
Short Title	
Statement of Policy	
Leading purpose of the bill (include historical background)	
Significant Provisions	
Administrative Provisions (optional)	
Date it is effective	
Complete written Bill (include all the information above in expository form)	[use a separate sheet as necessary]

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Part C: Talking points in support of proposed legislation

Problems in the current law	
Specific examples of how LGBTQ+ persons are hurt by current law	
Why the proposed law will be good for the	

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LGBTQ+ community	
Why the proposed law will be good for the community and society generally	

Wrap up discussion:

- a. How has your understanding of the LGBTQ+ and transgender experience changed?
- b. What are some ways of raising awareness of groups (including LGBTQ+) who are treated unequally and often denied basic human dignity in our society? (Social media campaign; PSAs; peaceful assemblies and demonstrations; lobbying legislators)
- c. If you are not part of a group experiencing discrimination, what are the benefits (both to that group ***and yourself***) of speaking out in support of that community? What are the risks?