

# Restructuring Elementary School Social Studies Curriculum to Include Black Female Activists

Ariel Durham

University of Houston Department of History

Faculty Advisor: Irene Guenther

UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**

## Background:

- My project focused on well-known black, female political activists as well as other women who utilized their experiences to propel change within their communities and in the American political system. The group of women I chose for this project were Shirley Chisholm, Ella Baker, Anna Arnold Hedgeman, Dorothy Height, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Pauli Murray.
- This project developed into being more education and curriculum focused as cries for more inclusive, diverse, and anti-racist curriculum were at a high point as the current national protests were unfolding. Thus, I realized that it might be effective and helpful to students if they were able to learn about outstanding “everyday” citizens through personal stories in order to promote civic engagement while diversifying curriculum.



## Beginning questions:

- Which historical figures are taught in schools and how are they depicted versus the reality of their stories?
- How do you prove it would be helpful to alter narratives?
- Who are some of these important women and when/why is it appropriate to teach them?
- How do curriculum and development changes occur on a state level versus on a federal level?

## Conclusion(s):

- Following a review of the TEKS curriculum guidelines, I concluded that kindergarten, third, and fifth grade elementary students had the most social studies curriculum dedicated to topics of citizenship, diversity and community, and overall U.S. history.
- For kindergarten, I would recommend teaching either Shirley Chisholm or Septima Clark because the guidelines clearly focus and prioritize citizenship as a member of their communities, schools, and households. Third graders are more advanced, and so historically marginalized groups such as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and women should be regularly included within the curriculum. I determined that Pauli Murray or Anna Arnold Hedgeman be taught at this grade level. Finally, fifth graders are taught American history from 1565 to the present, which is vast, so focusing on the personal stories of any of the individuals I have mentioned would work well.
- The public education system is highly politicized, and students are often negatively impacted as a result. The Texas State Board of Education is a political body that determines curriculum standards and approves textbooks. Educating students should not revolve around partisan political disagreements, and state school boards should consider the diversification of curriculum for several reasons. Students of color feel empowered when learning about BIPOC; the history of people of color is American history; our world is not limited to the U.S. alone; and a diverse curriculum points to real-life education, which is far more helpful to students.. Teaching a comprehensive, inclusive history curriculum should not be politicized for the sole purpose of promoting and/or sustaining the notion of (white) American exceptionalism.

## Looking forward:

- Due to my work this summer, I am hoping to continue researching the topic of the diversification and reform of current state curriculum standards and guidelines.
- I would eventually like to be able to complete a Senior Honors Thesis on a similar topic when the time arrives. For now, I will continue to slowly research my topic and gain more information and data through surveys, studies, and published papers.

## References:

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