



TEACHING TROUBLING HISTORIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM

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THOUGHT EXPERIMENT...

The Grade 4 social studies standards in New York have long covered local and state history. This includes New York's involvement in the American Revolution.

Find someone sitting near you who teaches or has taught Grade 4 social studies (or was once a Grade 4 student in New York).

Make a list of the main historical figures that are studied in this unit on New York's involvement in the American Revolution.

Let's share out some of those historical people on the lists...

DID YOU INCLUDE?

Thayendanegea or
Joseph Brant

Who was a New York-based
Mohawk leader and
commander of a Loyalist
regiment...



DID YOU INCLUDE?

Colonel Tye or Tutus Cornelius

Who escaped slavery in New Jersey and led the Black Brigade in New York, which was a Loyalist guerrilla unit...



DID YOU INCLUDE?

Agent 355 (Her real name is still unknown)

In New York, helped uncover Benedict Arnold's plot to betray the American Revolution.



SOCIAL IDENTITIES ARE OFTEN MISSING FROM THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

In my research, I argue that race and other social identities are often left out of the social studies classroom.

When race is included, it only appears in a handful of units (i.e. European colonialization, slavery, civil rights movement), which may be sending a message of victimization (with limited examples of resistance or success).



IMAGINE...

What if White people only saw themselves in the curriculum during units on the Irish famine or Depression breadlines? Now imagine that it was taught without explaining how these groups worked to overcome their condition.

It is essential that all students see examples of struggle, resistance, and success in their histories.



TEACHING SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

- Examining social identity is less common at the elementary-level compared to the secondary-level (Bolgatz, 2005; Epstein, 2009).
- Why? Teachers often cite that it is developmentally or morally inappropriate (Bolgatz, 2005) or they want to protect the perceived innocence of children (James, 2008).



IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL?
HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE
(AND GENDER)...



June 2013: Poster for Boys & Girls Club of Cleveland
Sends messages about Black women and their place in society

IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE...



May 2014: MSNBC Morning News

Included a White host wearing a sombrero and drinking tequila (I assume this was on TV while some parents got their kids ready for school).

IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE (AND IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE)...



January 2016: Donald Trump Presidential Campaign Television Ad
Features images of Latinos and Muslims using the lines “temporary shutdown of Muslims entering in the United States until we can figure out what is going on” and “build a wall on our southern border that Mexico will pay for.”

IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE...



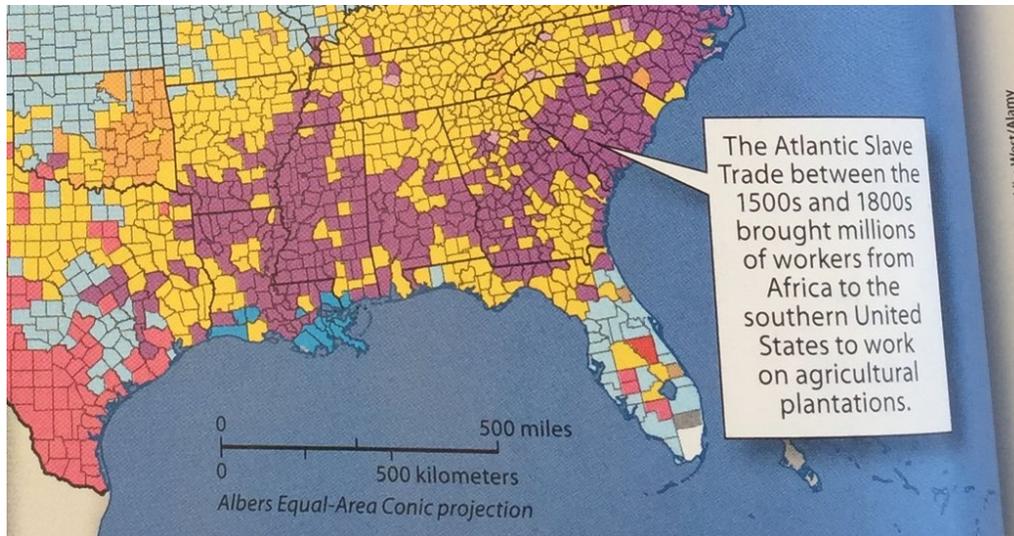
May 2015: Community Campaign Against the Carotis Billboard
At the intersection of Blue Hills Ave. and Warren Street
in Grove Hall section of Boston

IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE...



September 2013: “Apu” Controversy
Widely read piece on the Huffington Post and viewed documentary by Hari Kondabolu demanding the “Apu” character on “The Simpsons” be retired. Apu still continues to exist despite its portrayal of Indian American stereotypes.

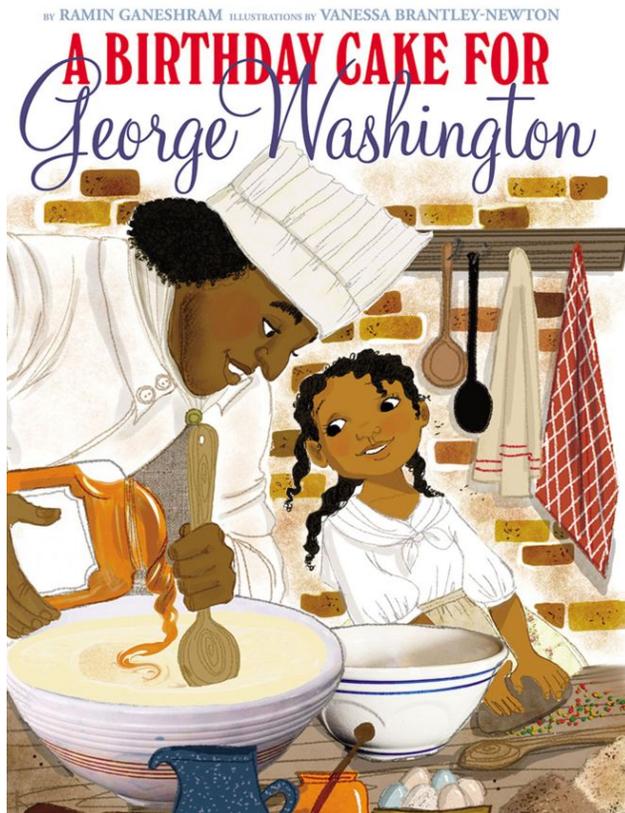
IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE...



October 2015: McGraw-Hill Textbook Controversy

Roni Dean-Burren posted on social media this map from her son's elementary social studies textbook that described slaves as "workers." It was widely covered in the media.

IF YOU DON'T TEACH IT, WHO WILL? HOW ELEMENTARY STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT RACE...



January 2016: “A Birthday Cake for George Washington” Controversy.

This story of portrayed slaves are happily preparing a cake for Washington, despite Hercules later running away.

MESSAGES ABOUT SOCIAL IDENTITIES ARE EMBEDDED IN SOCIETY.

Our social studies classroom need to help students unpack and understand the world that they live in.

It should help them understand themselves in relation to others in society.

This includes:

- Counteracting negative portrayals that they may see in the media and elsewhere.
- Understanding a more complex history of their ancestors and families, as well as others.



LET'S RETURN TO THAT HISTORICAL EXAMPLE.
HOW WE APPROACH SOCIAL IDENTITIES MATTERS...



TOLERANCE- AND EQUITY-ORIENTED TEACHING

In my studies of race-conscious elementary and secondary teachers (2017, 2018), I have found that there tends to be a division between tolerance- and equity-oriented teachers.

Tolerance-oriented teachers primarily work against individual prejudice. They see themselves as helping students learn to live together.

Equity-oriented teachers primarily work against racial inequity. They see themselves as helping their students understand injustice and ways to improve society.



IF WE WERE TO TEACH THESE HISTORICAL FIGURES, WHAT WOULD WE SAY ABOUT THEM?



TOLERANCE

TOLERANCE

Tolerance: To allow the existence of.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

Thayendanegea or Joseph Brant

Was Indigenous.

Spoke 8 languages.

Was a leader of the Mohawk people.

Led pro-British soldiers during the American Revolution.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

Colonel Tye or Tutus Cornelius

Escaped slavery in New Jersey.

Led the Black Brigade in New York, which was a Loyalist guerrilla unit.

Was a very successful military leader.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HER?

Agent 355 (Her real name is still unknown)

In New York, helped uncover Benedict Arnold's plot to betray the American Revolution.

Risked her life for the new American nation.



SOME EXAMPLES OF TROUBLING HISTORY THAT IS NOT BEING TROUBLED...



EQUITY

EQUITY

Equity: The quality of being fair.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

He was accused by the Americans of atrocities and labeled “Monster Brant” (although historians have disproven this-most likely used to evoke fear in local Whites)

After the war, his people’s lives were at risk and they fled to Canada.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

Colonel Tye or Tutus Cornelius

He joined the British forces, because Lord Dunmore promised freedom for enslaved people.

He died of tetanus and gangrene due to a gun shot wound (likely received worse medical treatment compared to White soldiers).



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HER?

Agent 355 (Her real name is still unknown)

Was pregnant during some of her spy work

Would die while imprisoned on a prison ship.

It is likely her gender made people doubt her abilities to aid the Patriot cause.



EQUITY

TOLERANCE

EQUITY

TOLERANCE

WHY IS EQUITY IMPORTANT?

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO TEACHING HISTORY?

Since its founding, the United States has been a multicultural nation, in the sense that people of different cultural backgrounds have lived together... However, we have not had an educational system that has embraced it.





“MIRRORS” (BISHOP, 1990)



“WINDOWS” (BISHOP, 1990)



I THINK ABOUT THIS A LOT AS A PARENT AND SEEING MY DAUGHTERS LEARN HISTORY IN SCHOOL...

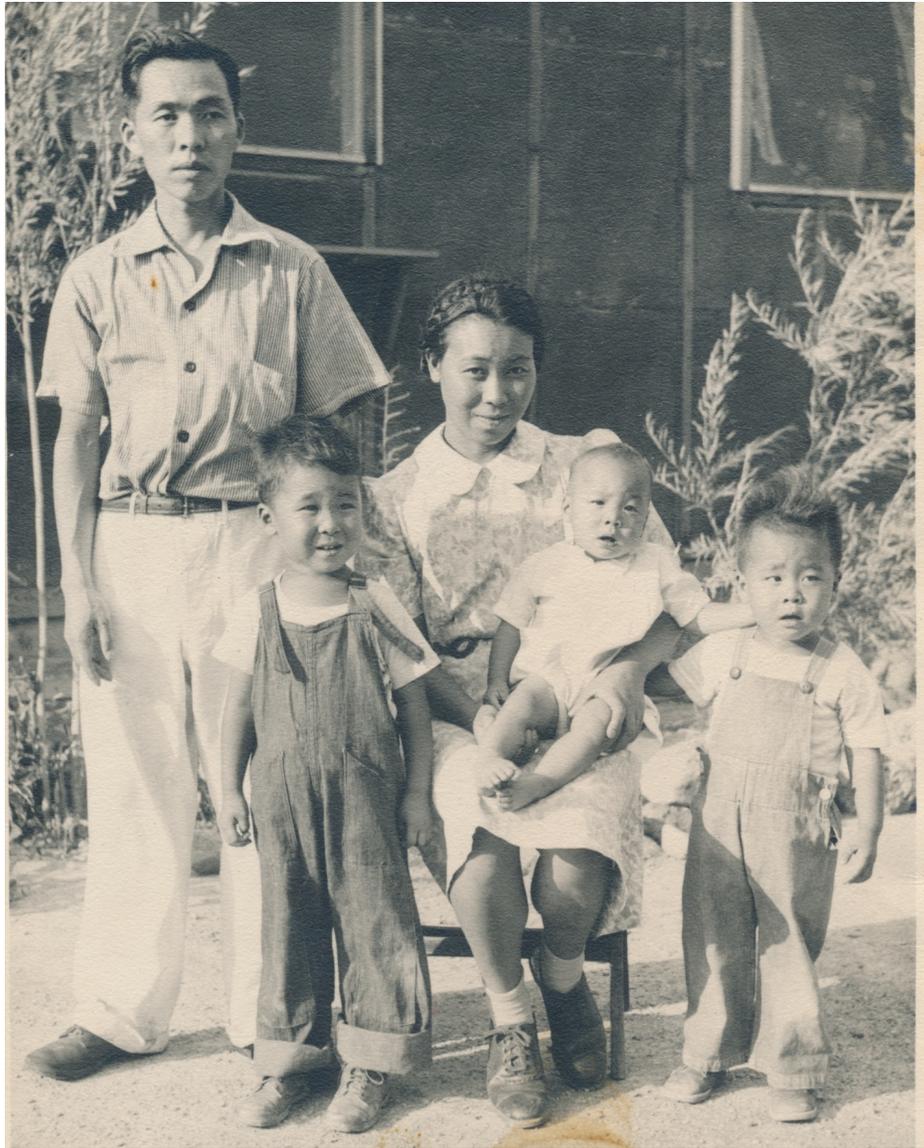


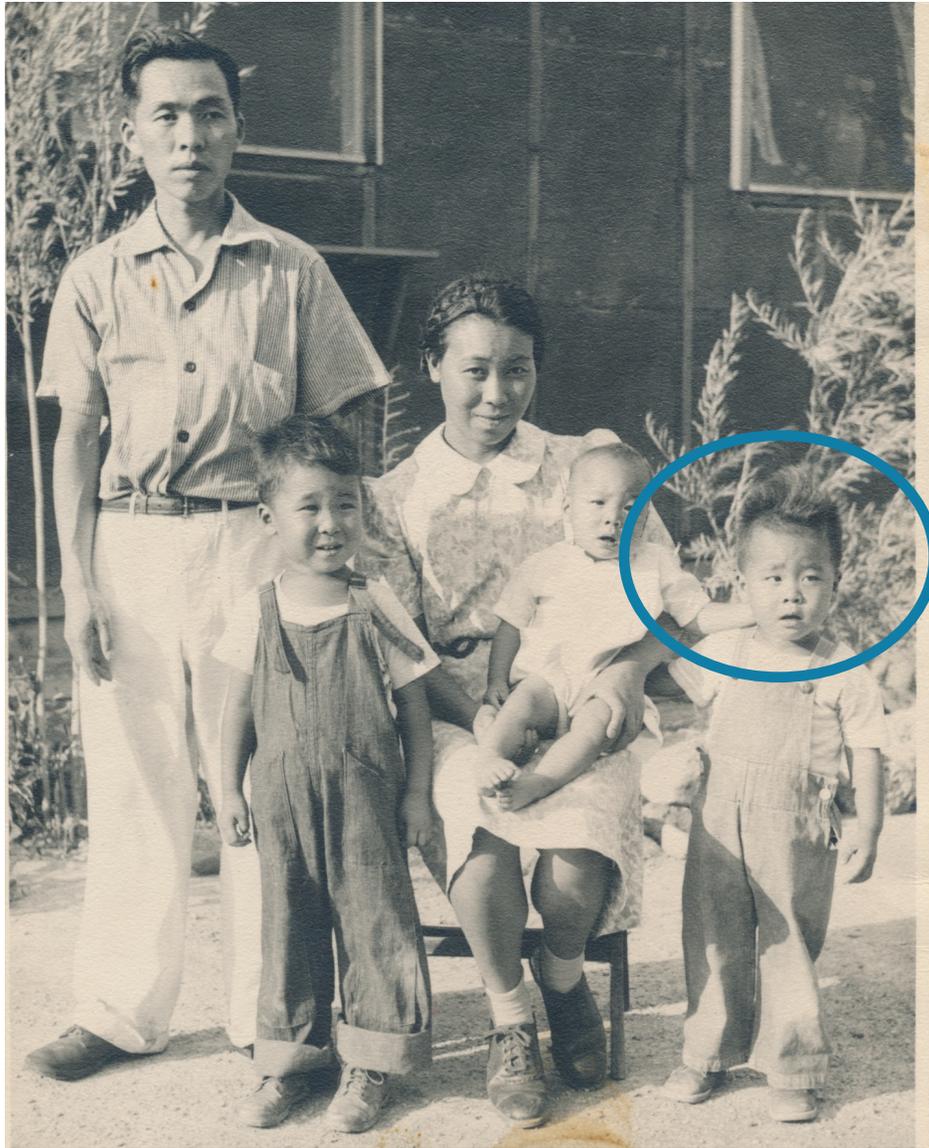
AN EXAMPLE FROM MY OWN FAMILY'S HISTORIES



EQUITY

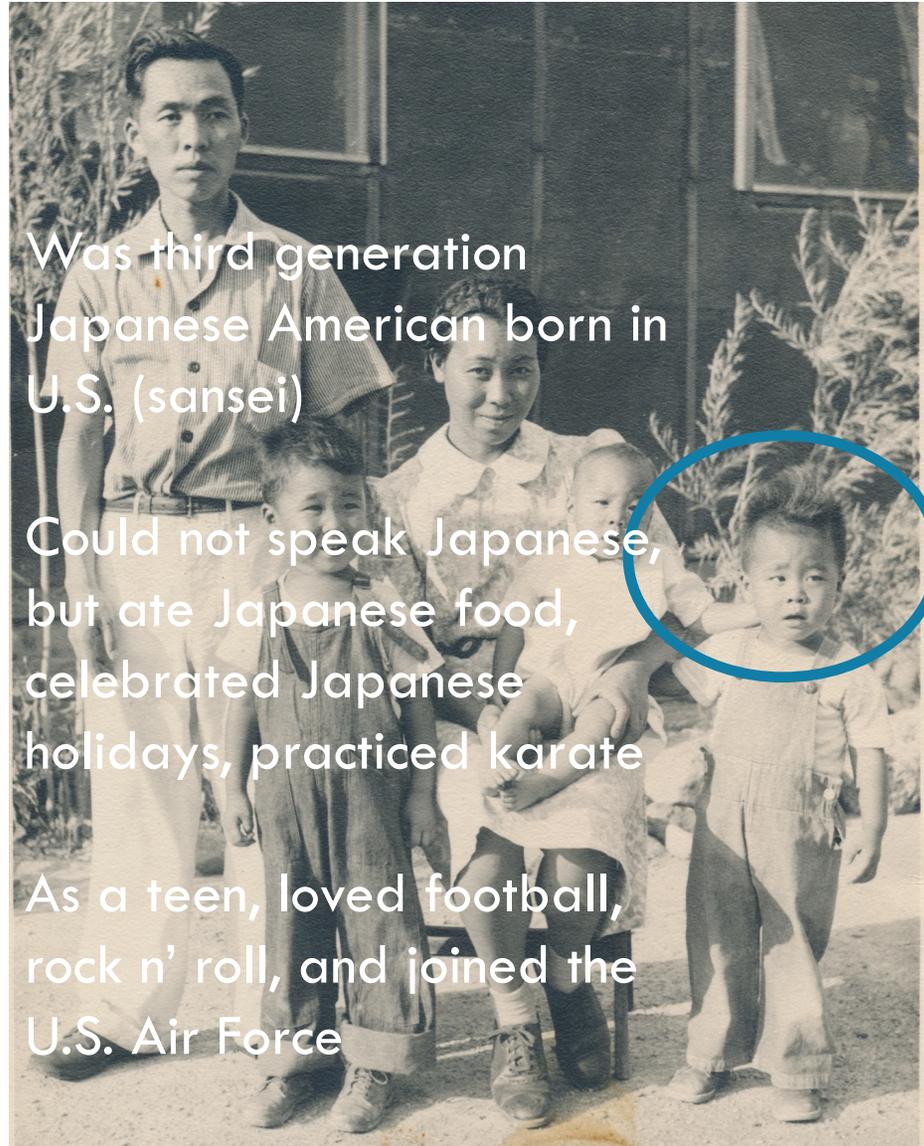
TOLERANCE





EQUITY

TOLERANCE



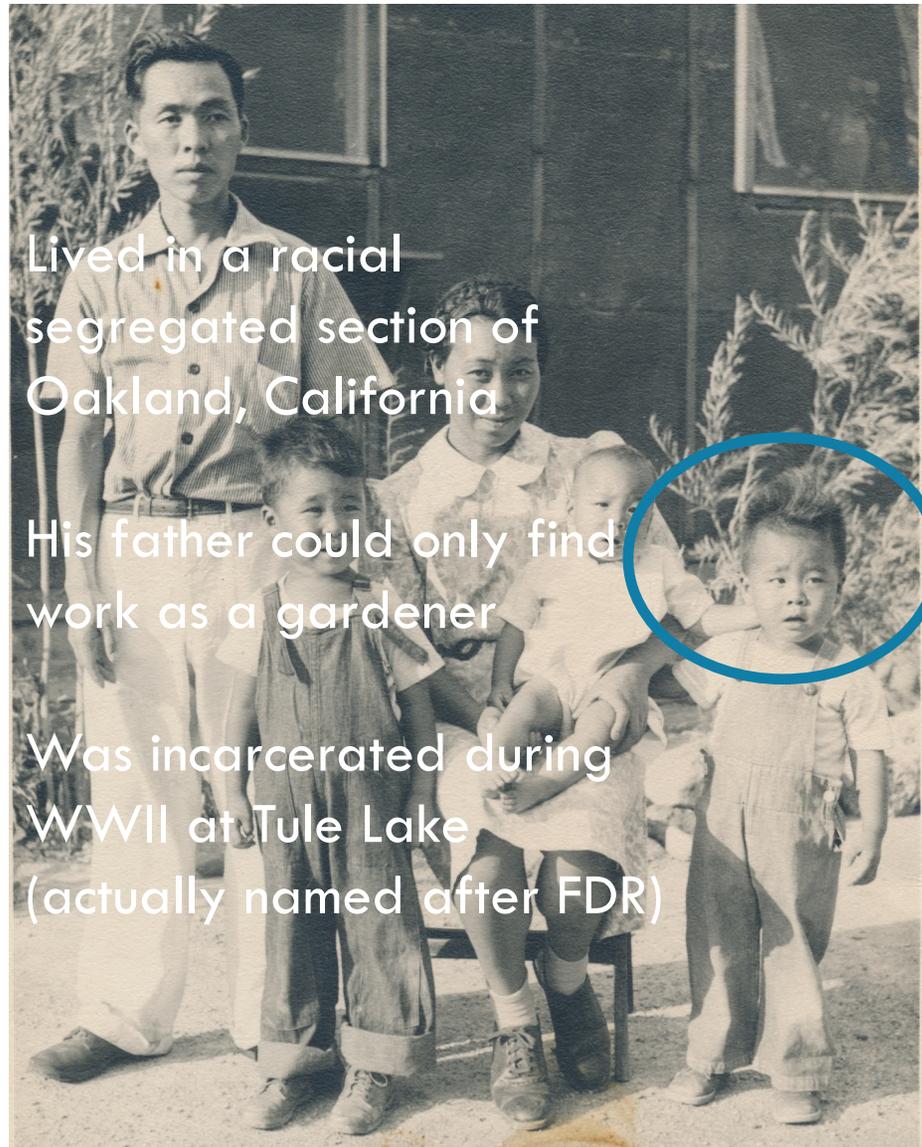
Was third generation
Japanese American born in
U.S. (sansei)

Could not speak Japanese,
but ate Japanese food,
celebrated Japanese
holidays, practiced karate

As a teen, loved football,
rock n' roll, and joined the
U.S. Air Force

EQUITY

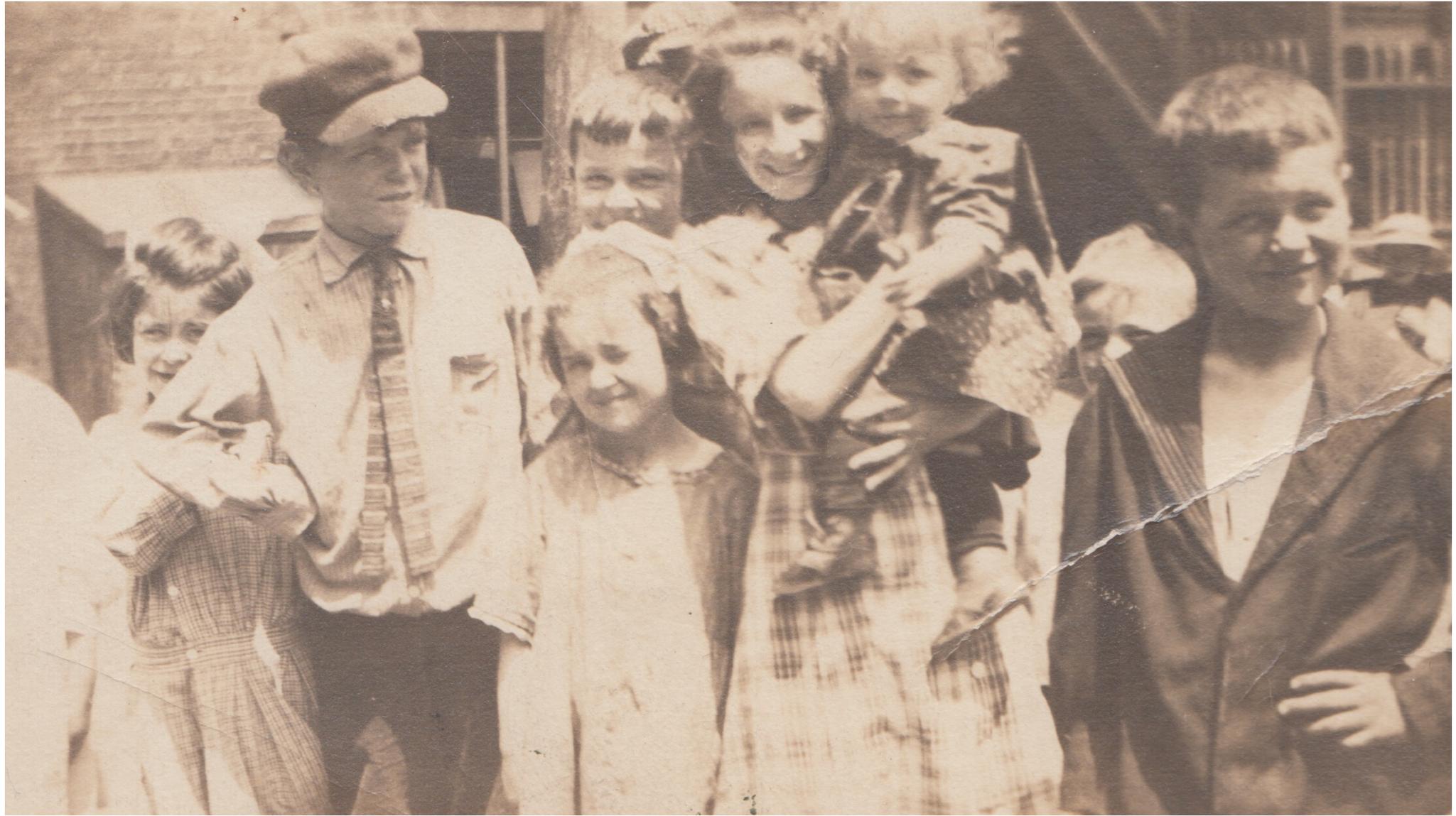
TOLERANCE

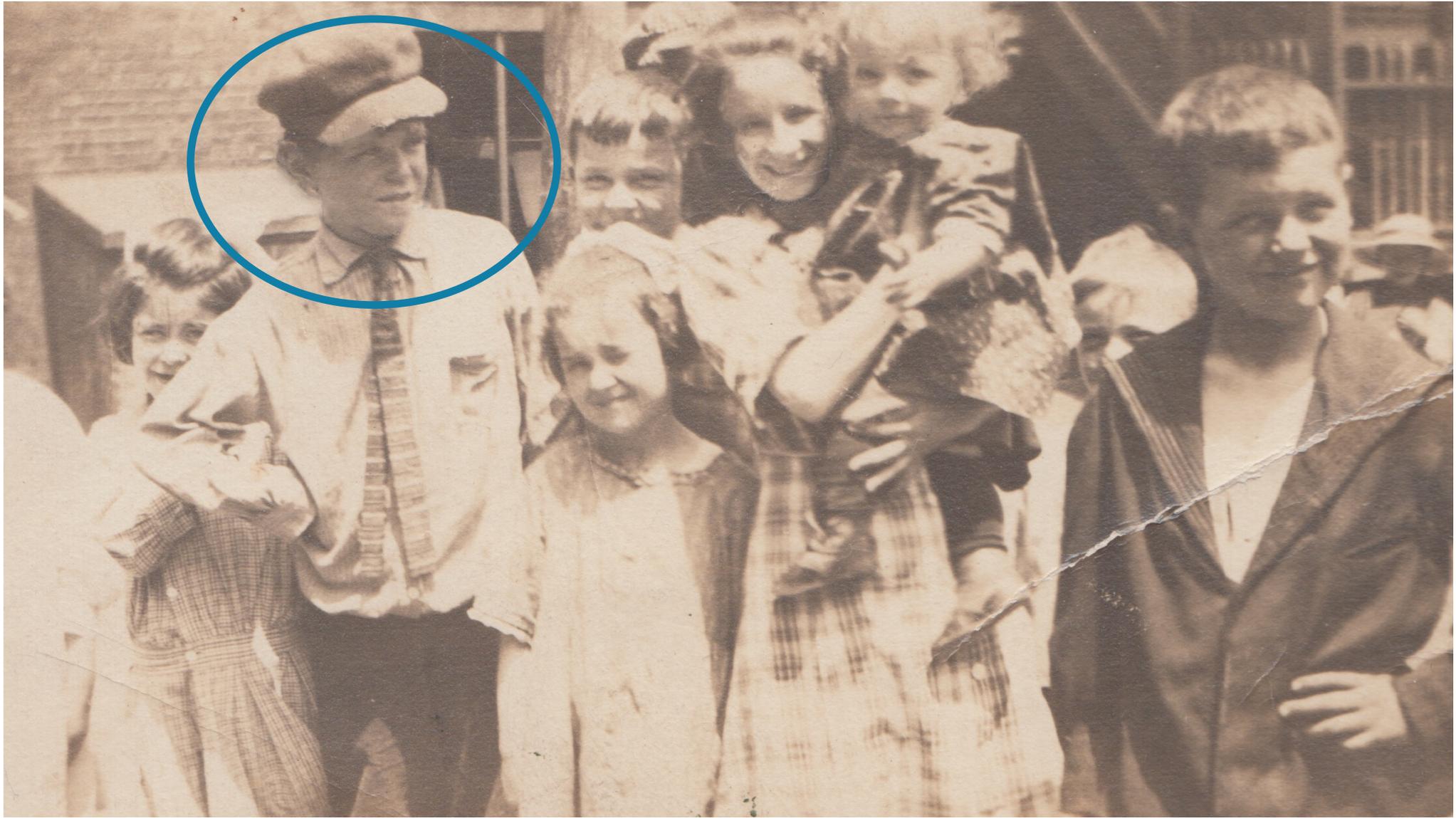


Lived in a racial
segregated section of
Oakland, California

His father could only find
work as a gardener

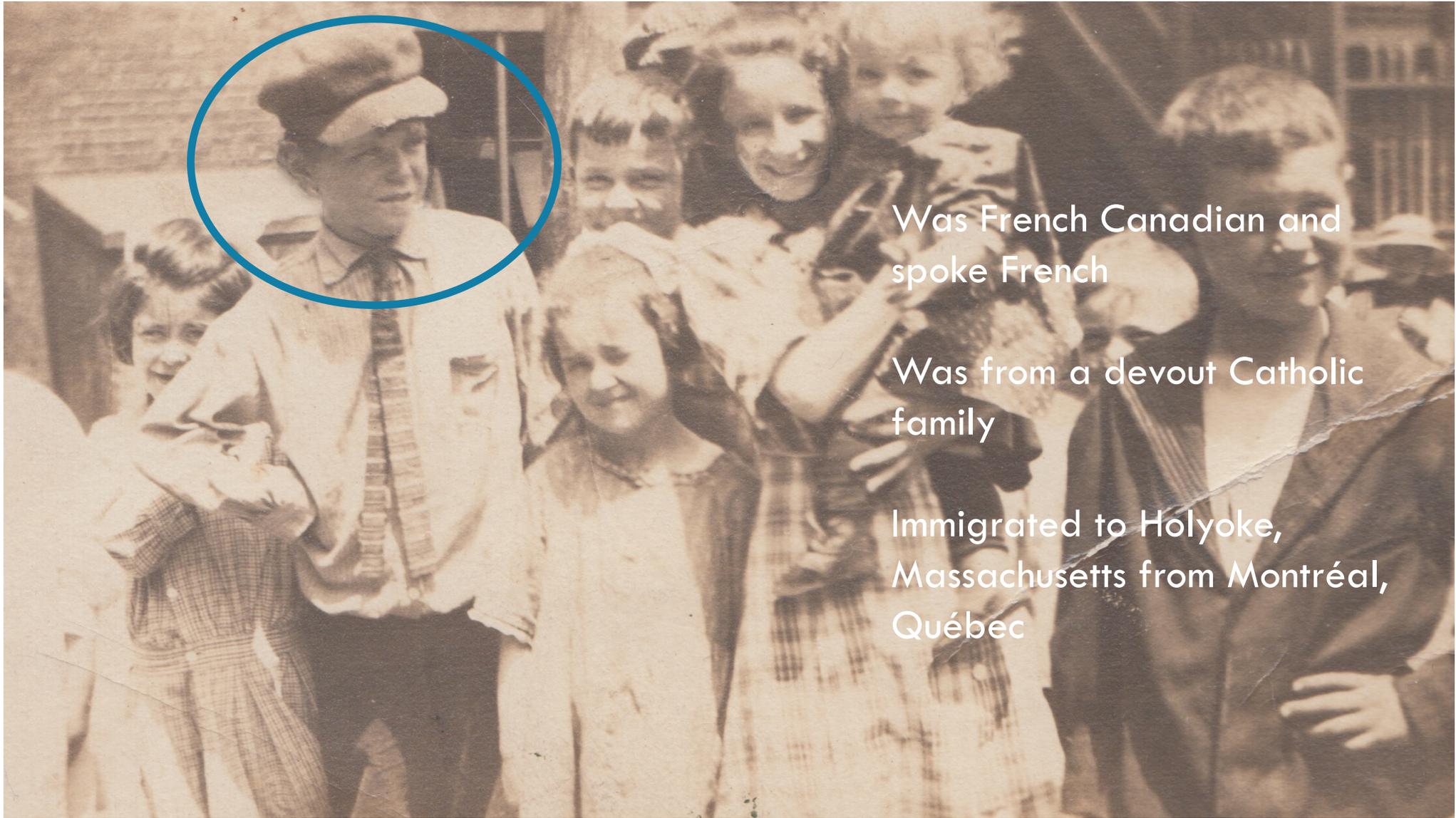
Was incarcerated during
WWII at Tule Lake
(actually named after FDR)





EQUITY

TOLERANCE



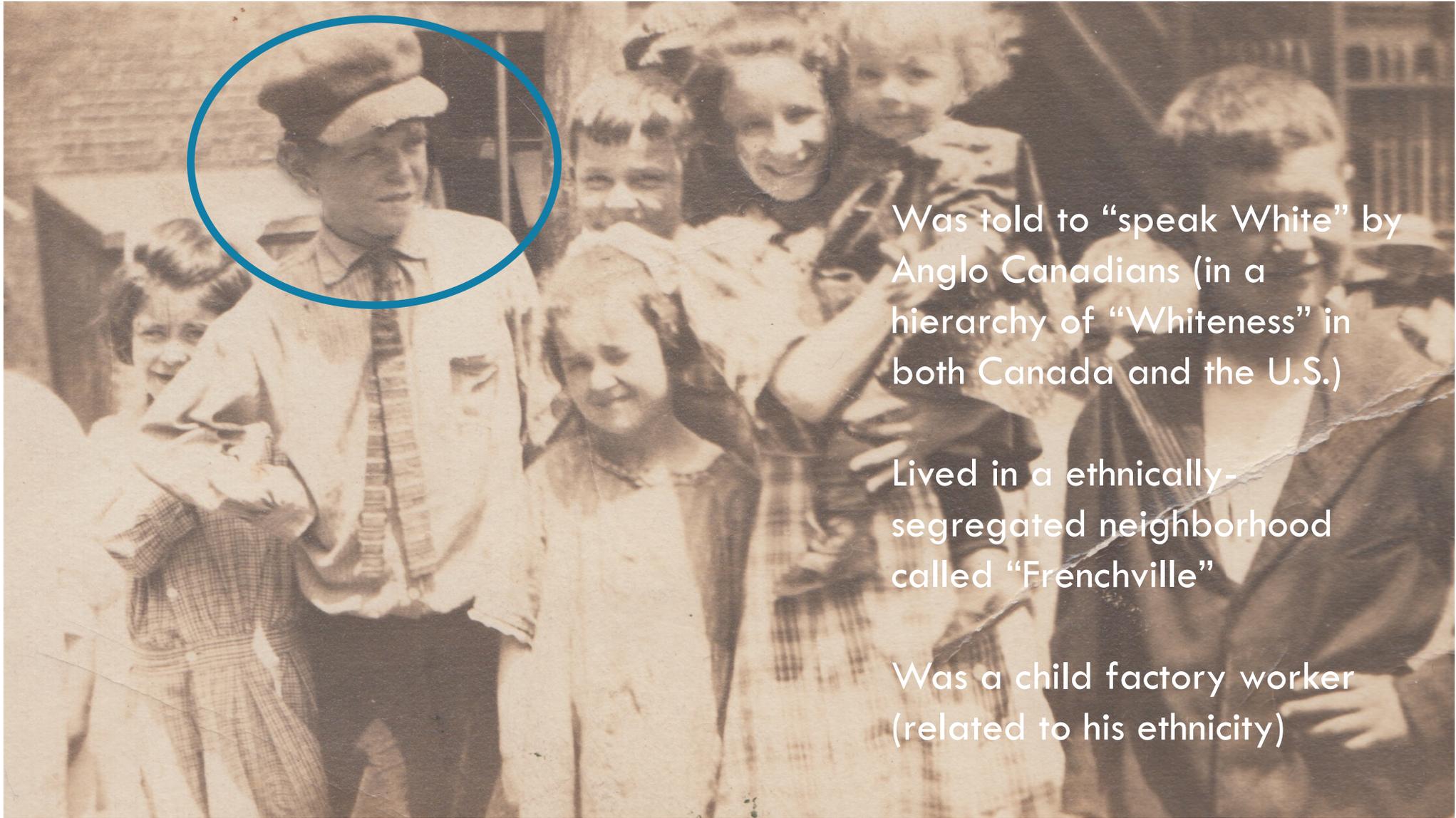
Was French Canadian and spoke French

Was from a devout Catholic family

Immigrated to Holyoke, Massachusetts from Montréal, Québec

EQUITY

TOLERANCE



Was told to “speak White” by Anglo Canadians (in a hierarchy of “Whiteness” in both Canada and the U.S.)

Lived in a ethnically-segregated neighborhood called “Frenchville”

Was a child factory worker (related to his ethnicity)

SOME EXAMPLES OF TROUBLING HISTORY THAT IS NOT BEING TROUBLED (AND HOW RACE AND ETHNICITY WERE MAJOR FACTORS IN THEIR LIVES)...



CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM

What would it look like if we created a multicultural curriculum that focused on these stories and were critical about our shared past?

How can we design lessons that focus on equity?

How can we prepare students as citizens focused on justice and the common good?

MOVING BEYOND TOLERANCE IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

By Sonia Nieto (1994)

We must move beyond tolerance as a goal of multicultural education.

Tolerance is only a low level of support.

It should be surpassed by acceptance, respect, affirmation, solidarity, and critique.

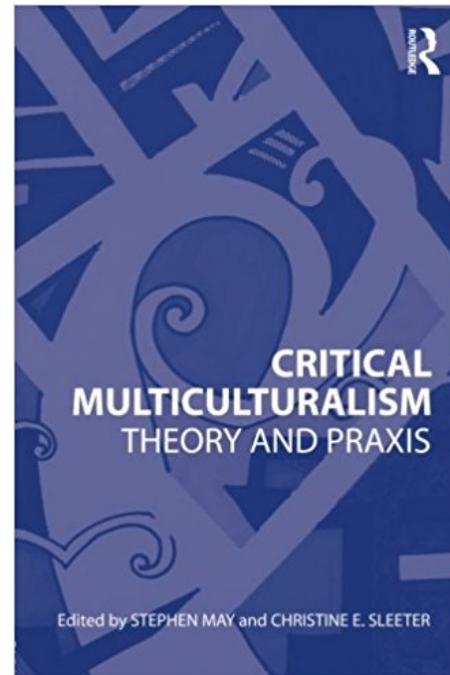


CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM: THEORY AND PRAXIS

By Stephen May and Christine Sleeter (2010)

One of the pitfalls of liberal multiculturalism is that it focuses on tolerance rather than equity.

Critical multiculturalism requires that a focus on equity be at the center of our work.



APPROACHES TO TEACHING RACE IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES: A CASE STUDY OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS

By Christopher Martell (2017)

Interpretative case study

Race-conscious elementary teachers.

Saw a difference between those who emphasized tolerance and equity.



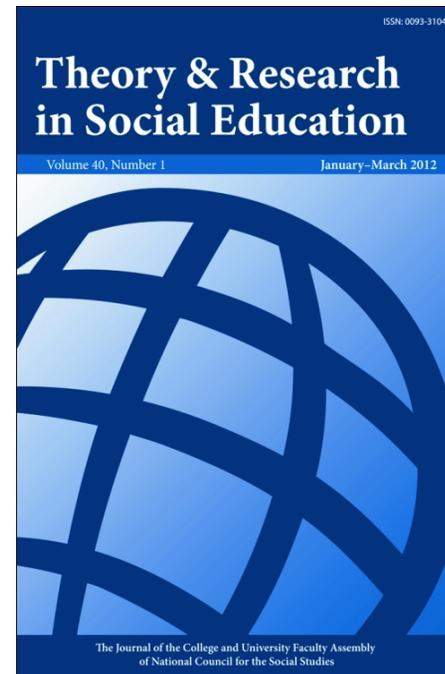
EQUITY-AND TOLERANCE-ORIENTED TEACHERS: APPROACHES TO TEACHING RACE IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

By Christopher Martell (2018)

Interpretative case study

Replicated the same study with
race-conscious secondary social
studies teachers.

Similar divisions existed
between tolerance- and equity-
oriented teachers.



SO, HOW DO WE TEACH CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL HISTORY?

- Challenge ourselves to **include at least one (if not more) underrepresented voice** in every social studies lesson.
- Help **White and male students see how their race and gender** are presented in society.
- Have students engage in **family histories that help them connect to past events, including troubling history.**



WHAT ARE CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL INQUIRIES?

- Frame around students **answering powerful and debatable questions.**
- Presenting many **overlapping and sometimes conflicting sources**, especially from groups often missing from the curriculum (provide both “windows” and “mirrors” for students).
- Focus learning on **equity**, rather than tolerance. Not just learning to live together, but **to create a more fair and just society.**
- Lessons help students understand that we must work against individual prejudice, but also **larger systems of unfairness.**

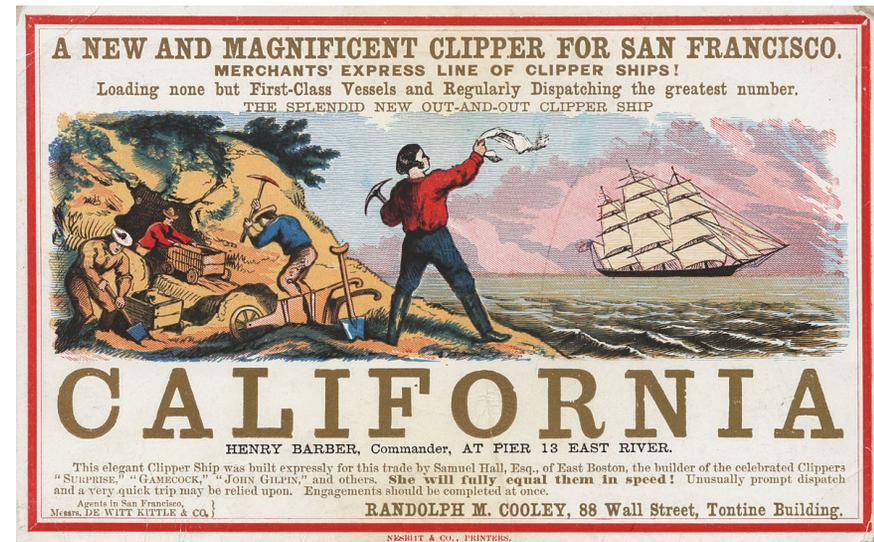
AN EXAMPLE OF A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL INQUIRY

What do you know about the California Gold Rush?

AN EXAMPLE OF A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL INQUIRY

Did we include:

Racial caste system rooted in the law that led to Whites having economic and political advantages over Latino, Asian, Black, and Indigenous miners, including Alien Laws preventing citizenship and legal slavery.



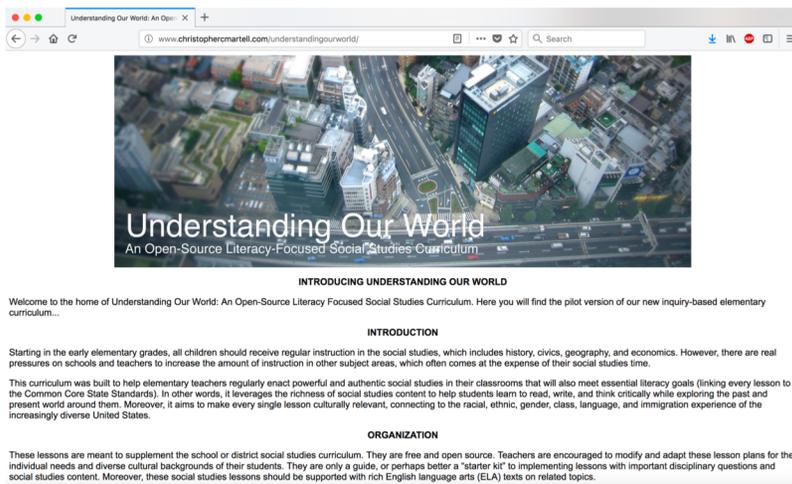
AN EXAMPLE OF A CRITICAL MULTICULTURAL INQUIRY

Should the California Gold Rush be remembered for its opportunity or its inequity?"

- Simulation of race-related laws
- Primary sources representing Anglo, Californios, Chinese, African American, and Chilean miners
- Exit ticket answering the above question



UNDERSTANDING OUR WORLD OPEN SOURCE CURRICULUM



Inquiry-based multicultural
elementary social studies
curriculum

Supplements school and district
social studies and language arts
curriculum

Still under development
(and feedback encouraged)

[www.christophercmartell.com/
understandingourworld/](http://www.christophercmartell.com/understandingourworld/)

QUESTIONS?

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