

Exploring Multiple Views of History

Investigating the Civil Rights Movement through an Oral History Project

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Introduction

According to the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) (2008), social studies programs should provide meaningful opportunities for students to view human experience from past, present, and future perspectives. NCSS calls for schools to provide children with a sense of history in order to develop an appreciation of the diverse heritage of the United States.

For teachers, this involves actively seeking knowledge from the past and using it to help children retain their own traditions while understanding the way those traditions change, today even more rapidly than ever (Levstik & Barton, 2001). Studying changes over time helps children become grounded in knowledge about the past while developing a historical perspective that will enable them to more fully understand today's present moment and make informed decisions about the future.

An appreciation of historical perspectives also allows responsible citizens to draw on what they know about the past in shaping the future (Greenberg, 1992). Developing historical understandings prepares children to recognize that individuals hold different views and interpretations of events in the past (Chapin, 2006; Hickey, 1999). This allows students to consider and offer explanations of why individual views differ, and to develop the ability to defend their own interpretations utilizing evidence from multiple sources (VanSledright, 2002; Winston, 1997). Through a formal study of history, students will continue to expand their perspectives and will be able then to apply the research methods associated with historical inquiry.

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The study we report here serves as a model for undergraduate students in elementary education to learn how a historical topic can be investigated by their students. As an effort to create multiple views of the past and as a context for teaching history to children, this study examined preservice elementary teachers' interpretations of interview information that was obtained from individuals who had personal experiences during the Civil Rights movement. The students then developed illustrated narrative accounts of the Civil Rights movement utilizing both research and the interview information, and finally opened a discourse about cultural diversity based upon the historical perspectives that were identified.

Drawing on data from the preservice elementary teachers' oral histories based on the theme "history is not a found reality but a socially and culturally constructed reality" (Wills, 2005, p.113), this study focused on the following Georgia Performance Standard:

GPS: SS5H8 The student will describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950-1975.

b. Explain the key events and people of the Civil Rights movement; include Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and civil rights activities of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.

c. Describe the impact on American society of the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. (GADOE, 2010)

The study was undertaken primarily to evaluate how preservice elementary teachers can come to understand and undertake the use of oral history in building a more relevant history curriculum. The model used in this study can be adjusted to support the learning of children in grades three through five and beyond.

Oral History

The data for this study were collected during preservice elementary teachers' implementation of an oral history project that focused on the Civil Rights movement. Oral history projects utilize current historical methodologies that encourage teachers to learn how to develop instruction that will help children refine their knowledge, skills, and perspectives as historical researchers.

This study involved seven college seniors who were preservice teachers enrolled in an elementary social studies methods course. They selected the topic of the Civil Rights movement for an oral history project, and expressed willingness to participate in the study and undertake interviews which would provide firsthand experiences and information related to the Civil Rights movement. Six of the participants were African Americans and one was a Caucasian.

The seven pre-service teachers each interviewed their grandparents, all of whom were individuals in their seventies who had lived during the time of the Civil Rights movement. The procedure for the study involved the students first researching the Civil Rights movement, focusing on the concepts articulated in the Georgia performance standard, and then generating open-ended interview questions and conducting interviews with family members who had personal lived experience with the topic.

After completing the interviews, the students analyzed the results by comparing the information they had previously acquired during the research phase of the project with the information they obtained during the interview. After this analysis, the students converted the information from the interviews into a narrative written from a first person perspective, as if their interviewee was telling the story.

In order to personalize the acquired

historical account and make it more relevant, each narrative required a creative format such as a simulated journal entry or letter. Afterwards, the students created a visual presentation in such formats as a tri-fold presentation board, a scrapbook, a journal format, or a storyboard, or a story cube, using an art strategy such as drawing, painting, diorama, or collage. These visual presentations were used when each individual shared their research and interview with the class.

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively by reading multiple times the documents of the preservice elementary teachers' interviews, their analyses about the research and interviews, and the resulting narratives to identify themes and patterns. The data were analyzed by selective coding and sorted into themes and categories relevant to the Civil Rights movement. We discussed and shared the findings of the data analysis and the interpretation with our seven participants as a way to confirm and expand the depth of our understanding and meaning-making within the larger research context.

Understanding the Civil Rights Movement

To understand the Civil Rights movement, it is necessary to understand the long struggle of African-American citizens in the U.S. to gain equal rights and access to education, courts, government, employment, and all of the other institutions to which mainstream people in our society already enjoyed access. What follows is an overview of that historical time period, reconstructed by sharing the perspectives gained from student research and from the first-person accounts and interviews.

One interviewee described her experiences,

There were days I was scared to go anywhere. I can say that many of my friends went through a lot of struggles. They were thrown in jail. They were sprayed with water hoses, chased by furious dogs, and beaten.

The interviewees remembered the violence associated with a divided society during the period of segregation.

The students' research examined the course of several events, court cases, and key individuals of the Civil Rights movement, and the stories obtained from the interviewees demonstrated the relevance of those events to the people living them. The preservice elementary teachers were enlightened as they analyzed the infor-

mation they collected from these multiple sources. In this way, the struggles of the Civil Rights movement came alive for them.

The information gathered was organized by five overarching topics—school segregation, the Montgomery bus boycott and Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., segregation of public facilities, and the Voting Rights Act. An overview of each topic follows, providing historical context and utilizing excerpts drawn from the interviews.

School Segregation

The African-American participants recalled their struggles involving segregation in public schooling. There had been separate public schools for Caucasians and African Americans and the African-American students were denied attendance at "White only" schools.

I remember walking about 15 miles to school every morning because we weren't allowed to attend White schools close by. I missed a lot of days from school because some days it would be too hard for me to walk. I remember hiding in the shed behind our house in the morning until mama went to work. She always left the back door open because my uncle would come and pick up things, and once she left I would sneak back inside and rest. We couldn't ride the bus because at that time there wasn't a bus that came through my neighborhood, and even then you weren't guaranteed a seat on the bus. Once I got there [school], I was pretty tired. I recall having tons of blisters and calluses on my feet from walking such a great ways.

Comparing the qualitative differences of public schools for "Whites" and "Blacks," the African-American interviewees pointed to the high value of positive self-esteem and education of their teachers despite a lack of resources.

Once at school my teacher always made us feel welcomed. We didn't have much in our classroom compared to the things they had in white only schools, but I learned a lot. My teacher worked hard, and I can still remember to this day she would say, "It's not what people think about you, but it's what you think about yourself." I still live by those words today.

However, the Caucasian participant related a perspective from a White citizen about how integrated public schooling experiences impacted her children negatively.

I had to move my children to a different school. My children were feeling very threatened by the African Americans be-

cause they stole their money and picked on them. I moved them to an all-White school. I felt sorry for the Black teachers because they probably felt resented.

In 1896, the United States Supreme Court in a case entitled *Plessy v. Ferguson* ushered in more than half a century of legal segregation based on the infamous "separate but equal" doctrine. Prior to *Plessy*, Supreme Court Justice Harlan wrote in his dissent in the Civil Rights cases of 1883,

Blacks were granted state citizenship; so, what rights, privileges, and immunities did they receive? If nothing else, they received exemption from race discrimination against them with respect to any civil right that White citizens enjoy in the same state. (*Civil Right Cases*, p. 47)

In *Plessy*, Justice Harlan wrote in his dissent,

... in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. (*Plessy*, p. 559)

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court vindicated Justice Harlan's dissents and overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas*. *Brown* involved a consolidation of cases from states that either required or permitted the denial of African-American children's admittance into all-White schools. The Federal District Courts had denied relief, citing *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the "separate but equal" doctrine. The plaintiffs, the African-American children, argued that "separate but equal" was not equal and could never be made equal, thereby violating the equal protection of the law required by the fourteenth amendment (*Brown*, p. 487). In 1954 the Supreme Court agreed.

In the *Brown* decision the Court held that even if all tangible factors—buildings, teacher's salary and qualifications, curriculum, and any others—were equal, "separate but equal" was fundamentally not equal (*Brown*, p. 492). The separation based on race "generates a feeling of inferiority" affecting motivation, and mental and educational development (*Brown*, p. 494). The Court held that, within public education, the "separate but equal" doctrine violated the equal protection guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

By investigating the topic of school segregation and hearing the related stories of the interviewees, the preservice

elementary teachers came to understand the negative impact that segregation had on both Black and White citizens. They understood more clearly the struggle of African Americans for equal access to education as a public service that all citizens should have been able to take for granted. In addition to school segregation, many other factors of African Americans' lives were impacted by segregation.

Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks

You already know this stuff, but it's different when you actually experience it.

The African-American participants brought perspective to the segregation and discriminatory system that had existed in public transportation at that time.

I remember hearing my Mama and Daddy talking about a day they experienced on the bus system. People suffered a lot on those bus systems, and sometimes Whites really didn't want to ride the bus, but they would get on just to make the Black people stand up. I remember riding once with my mother to do some grocery shopping. By the time we got to the store every Black person on the bus was standing close together at the very back of the bus while the Whites sat comfortably in their seats. I knew this wasn't right, but I was taught to do as I was told and not question things.

While the Caucasian participant considered Rosa Parks "a historical figure," she had never heard what Parks actually did during the Civil Rights era. In contrast, Parks was significantly appreciated as the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" by the African-American participants.

During those days we really didn't have a choice. It was either give up your seat or get dragged off the bus and to the county jail. I remember Rosa Parks as if it were yesterday. I was probably around twenty three years old. I didn't know what to expect after this happened. I knew people were planning sit-ins and boycotts, but I didn't expect this. She was a very brave woman, and I respect her greatly to this day.

On December 1, 1955, the African Americans of Montgomery, Alabama, decided to boycott the city buses in an effort to desegregate the bus system. The African-American participants described their various feelings about the bus boycott.

It did make me angry and I wanted to fight back. I was happy because we had started speaking up for our rights. We stopped falling for the things the White people had against us. I'm so happy because we stepped to the plate. I am glad that Martin

Luther King, Jr. started the movement. It was a good start to changing racism. It was frightening. People were getting hurt and I didn't feel safe. I was worried about my Black family in the movement. Dr. King was nonviolent but the younger generation was very violent.

One African-American interviewee related that it was "the Montgomery bus boycott that gave African-American people the belief that they could do something about the way that they were being treated."

It is difficult for most contemporary Americans, especially children, to imagine a society in which fellow citizens were not allowed to enjoy equal access to a public service at that time. African Americans paid the same fare as Caucasian bus riders, but could only sit in the rear and were required to surrender their seats to White riders if requested. The consequences were dire for individuals who did not comply.

By researching these events and hearing the related personal accounts of people who were personally affected, the preservice elementary teachers began to understand how deeply racism, discrimination, and segregation had permeated American society.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The interviewees clearly remembered Martin Luther King, Jr., who, in their view, had stood up for what he believed in—civil rights and equal opportunities for all people. One African-American participant said,

Martin Luther King, Jr. was trying to make this place a better world for us to live and create more opportunities for Black people. It was a well-deserved honor to reserve a national holiday for him.

In contrast, the Caucasian participant explained,

I'm amazed that they have a Martin Luther King Boulevard in almost every city I visit. People still try really hard to honor him. He did a lot for the Blacks and gave them hope for freedom. He was from Atlanta, which is where I later lived. A lot of Blacks talked about him and knew who he was. I really don't remember hearing that much about him until I moved to Atlanta.

This reminds us of Wills' (2005) argument regarding multiple perspectives of history.

The creation of public memorials, the establishment of holidays to commemorate specific figures and events in history, and other commemorative activities often incited heated battles over who or what we ought to remember and the correct ways

to remember and interpret the past. Such struggles over the representation and interpretation of the past reveal the politics of memory and history. (p. 111)

Remembering the racial discrimination and segregation during the Civil Rights movement, the participants discussed Martin Luther King, Jr.'s advocacy of nonviolence.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. (King, Jr., 1963)

King confronted social injustice with a nonviolent approach:

Martin Luther King, Jr. said if anything ever happened to him, don't act violent. Martin Luther King, Jr. told his followers, "I look down the barrel of a gun every day." He preached his own funeral. He said, "Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will and he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But we as a people will make it to the Promised Land. Now I'm not afraid of any man, my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." (King, Jr., 1963)

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C., calling for racial harmony and equal opportunities for jobs. One interviewee illustrated the deep respect and hope that African Americans held towards Dr. King,

I remember leaving the house six months pregnant just to hear him speak. If only you could have experience[d] the hearts of the people that gathered for freedom. We all had to be there.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech gave hope that their struggles would soon be over. However, at 6:01 p.m. on April 4, 1968, their hope turned to sadness and devastation.

Dr. King was shot. He was at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. It was a fatal shot. He got shot in the neck. Snapped his neck. I didn't know what to do. That whole day I was sad with a sense of loss in my heart. I did not want this to happen but the man who was the leader in this movement had just been taken from us.

But the African-American participants continued to look for hope.

I knew that the Civil Rights movement would slow down until everyone had recovered from the shock of what had hap-

pened. I knew that someone was going to pick up from where he left off. I was just praying that it would not take too long to happen.

In 1963, President Kennedy called upon Congress to end discriminatory practices within public accommodations. Following the assassination of Kennedy, Congress heeded the call and passed the most sweeping anti-discrimination bill in American history, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Soon thereafter, legal challenges began attacking the constitutionality of the act. The Supreme Court considered one such challenge, *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States* (1964), which related to access to motels. This case serves as one example of discriminatory treatment of African Americans prior to and following the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Segregation in Public Facilities

One interviewee recounted experiences with racial segregation in housing and public facilities.

There was a time that I was denied the right to eat in a diner because I was Black. Whites and Blacks did not even live on the same side of the railroad tracks. There was a White side and a Black side. I only wanted a burger and fries but was denied because I was a few shades too dark. I remember going places and there would be 'White only' signs. The Fox Theatre had two entrances for Blacks and Whites, water fountains were segregated, and at drugstores Blacks couldn't sit at the counter and eat. The Blacks would do sit-ins at the diners and the police would come in and get them.

The Heart of Atlanta Motel continued the practice of refusing to serve African Americans after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The legal challenge centered on Title II, Section 201(a) which stated "all persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodation..." The Federal District Court invalidated the act and issued a permanent injunction later in 1964 prohibiting the Heart of Atlanta Motel from discriminating among its patrons. The United States Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's decision, upholding the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as it applied to the practices of that motel.

The Court determined that Congress had a rational basis by finding that racial discrimination by motels affected commerce and that Title II, Section 201(a) of

the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a reasonable and appropriate means of eliminating such "evil" (Heart of Atlanta, p. 258). The United States Supreme Court stated that the Heart of Atlanta Motel "has no right to select its guests as it sees fit, free from government regulation" (Heart of Atlanta, p. 259).

By researching the history of discrimination and the events of the Civil Rights movement and interviewing individuals who provided accounts of related personal experiences, the preservice elementary teachers gained a clear understanding of the significance of this period of American history. By hearing interviewees' descriptions of how they had been treated, the history became real. This history had been experienced by people the preservice elementary teachers knew. This made it relevant to their own lives.

Voting Rights Act

My parents didn't go vote. I remember my first presidential election when I voted in 1960 for President Kennedy. People lost their lives for us to be able to vote. It was an awesome feeling. To stand in that line, it made me feel really good. Kennedy was our first president that we voted for.

The 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, an amendment that followed the end of the Civil War and that specified the rights of freed male slaves to vote, was ratified in 1870, specifically providing that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The amendment further provided that "The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Within several years after the ratification of the 15th Amendment, the Civil War reconstruction period ended and ex-Confederate states reclaimed their autonomous sovereignty. Within this mindset of renewed independence, those states began imposing, either through legislation or within their newly written state constitutions, racially motivated provisions restricting the right to vote of African-American citizens.

State-imposed restrictions on the right to vote included such infamous provisions as the poll tax, literacy and comprehension tests, and grandfather clauses. The poll tax was a fee charged to exercise the right to vote. The literacy and comprehension tests involved reading certain passages and answering questions based on the particular

reading. In many instances, the administrators of the test were given the responsibility of determining who was required to take the test and who successfully passed the test, leading to discriminatory application of the tests. To prevent such state-imposed restrictions from disenfranchising White citizens, the states enacted grandfather clauses exempting citizens whose relatives had the right to vote prior to the Civil War (Winkler, 1998).

The notorious actions of the Alabama State Police against the participants of the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965 resulted in the federal government taking action to end the disenfranchisement of African Americans. The first Selma to Montgomery march was organized by the Dallas County Voters League of Alabama for the purpose of asking Governor George Wallace to protect African-American voter registrants. As the march progressed over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, the participants were attacked by the Alabama state troopers, who used tear gas and nightsticks. The images of the bloodied marchers on television and in newspapers and magazines across the nation led to the naming of the day as "Bloody Sunday." Several subsequent marches were led by such Civil Rights leaders as King, Reverend Shuttlesworth, and Rabbi Abraham (Winkler, 1998).

As a result, Congress passed and President Johnson signed the National Voting Rights Act of 1965 to end the discriminatory disenfranchisement of African-American citizens. The act's language paralleled the 15th Amendment by prohibiting the states from creating or imposing any "voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard, practice, or procedure... to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color."

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited the use of any literacy test in any federal or state election. The act also required any state, county, or city with a history of disenfranchising African Americans to seek approval from the United States Justice Department prior to changing any future election procedure or practice.

Many additional court cases have followed, some successful and others unsuccessful in seeking to address continued practices of discrimination and segregation. However, as our study participants reviewed the research and personal stories of interviewees, they came to realize the extent to which these huge societal issues have been at least partially settled while

also recognizing that there still remain many related struggles to be addressed by the current generation.

Civil Rights Movement and Today

It took a while for things to change. I think the generation today has come a long way since those days.

In this way, and many others, the interviewees described the changes in their lives after the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.

People weren't as afraid to walk by themselves. Black people were allowed into new places, and my favorite part was the movie theater. At first, we could only sit at the very top, but after then we could sit at the front and see the picture clearly. It was great. I just thanked God for being so awesome.

They mentioned that some of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement would feel pleased about today's transitions that have "integrated as much as it has." One interviewee said, "For the most part, Dr. King's dream has come true, even though there is still more work to do."

My lifestyle then was something I needed to make me stronger for my children. I still reside in Mississippi, and yes, at times I may still experience a hint of racism, but will it ever go away? Probably not. I have never imagined a Black running for presidency. Absolutely not. It was a shock for me but a blessing at the same time. It sent a message to all young youth that you really can do anything you set your mind to do. It gives us all hope for change. I feel hopeful that America will see the positive message behind this election.

Regarding the 2008 presidential election, the Caucasian participant discussed both a perceived decline in racism as well as her personal beliefs about equality.

I think that we have evolved over time because Senator Obama could have never been elected if we hadn't. I would like to think that over time we have seriously changed, but some still have racial views. Personally, I have changed and I have realized that everyone deserves to be treated equally.

The participants also shared their learnings from the Civil Rights movement as they relate to the U.S. today.

I learned to appreciate things better and stay more involved in what is going on; It showed me that not only my children, but anyone should stand up for what they believe in and not to let anyone or anything stop them. At any time during the Civil

Rights movement they could have given up. Their and their family's lives were in so much danger. They did not give up and that is a message that I will always give to my children. My kids read the 'I Have a Dream' speech. This speech reminds us of the dream that Martin Luther King, Jr. had and how far we have come and how much further we have to go. I tell them to always have a dream and goals and never let anyone tell them that they cannot be reached. I tell them not to try to be like Martin or anyone else, but to be themselves.

Getting Deeper Knowledge and Insight about History

Through this exploration of the Civil Rights movement, the participants became active agents of meaning-making of their experiences and feelings about the past. As individuals with unique life experiences, the participants recounted their personal understandings, beliefs, and views about the Civil Rights movement within their own sociocultural context. This study developed an emergent narrative of the Civil Rights movement generated by the preservice elementary teachers, their interviewees, and the researchers.

Struggles over what of the past we should remember and the "correct" way to remember them have become more evident during the culture wars and history wars of recent years. Efforts to reform the K-12 social studies curriculum in a way that reflects social and cultural diversity and to create national standards for history education have provoked heated debates among the general public and academics over what we ought to remember and what counts as legitimate history (Wills, 2005, p. 109).

During the process of interviewing and obtaining personal stories from the Civil Rights movement and comparing the collected life experiences of the interviewees with the research about the same topic gained from other sources, the preservice elementary teachers each became a "social actor contextualized in a complex web of structured social relations" (Sealey, 2009, p.216), each participant learning of the multiple voices and interpretations regarding history. "Social studies are about phenomena to be explored, not just answers to memorize" (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p.143).

This oral history project prepared the preservice elementary teachers to teach history to young children by expanding their content knowledge of historical events and shaping history relevant to their lives through the stories of people who lived the history. Hudson, Jr. and Santora (2003)

argue that the importance of oral histories is in providing "content-rich professional development experiences that support teachers' need for dialogue, partnership, and reflection in the creation of coherent and critical theories and practices that engage students in the authentic tasks of collecting, reading, interpreting, talking about, and writing history" (p. 207).

Through this oral history project, these future teachers researched the Civil Rights movement, became more knowledgeable about the topic, drafted interview questions to obtain more well-versed and informed information based on their learning about the topic, conducted interviews, and then processed the information that they received from the interviews by comparing it to the information found during their research. The preservice elementary teachers thus researched and analyzed the Civil Rights movement from multiple perspectives through the several stages of the oral history project.

Beyond personalizing American history or making it more real, the stories provide a sense of depth and complexity often neglected in a survey history course because they tie together personal experiences and national events. Oral interviews help students learn an important and powerful lesson: People like us make history. (Dillion, 2000, p. 605)

Ultimately, the preservice elementary teachers acknowledged that the oral history project gave them in-depth knowledge and insight of the past.

The oral history project gave me a new understanding of the Civil Rights movement. Conducting this interview really allowed me to understand what it was like during the Civil Rights era. I hear about it all the time, and I've done research on the topic, but it's totally different when you have a relative that experienced the era first hand. After talking about segregation and integration of the schools with my grandmother, I realized that things did not change overnight for the Blacks. She still remembers a lot of the Civil Rights movement like it was yesterday. I guess significant events make an imprint on your life.

Recreating Life Stories That Talk about History

History evokes a narrative of the past, and oral indicates a medium of expression. (Portelli, 1998, p.23)

Stemming from the belief that history is reinterpreted and reconstructed by the informants providing their stories, the preservice elementary teachers arrived at their own conclusions through a mutual process

of meaning-making. They constructed their own understanding by writing a narrative based on the interviews and research about the Civil Rights movement. "The record is a selective one that itself selects information from the selective record of the witness/narrator's memory of past events and subjects" (Moss, 1996, p. 111).

The six African-American participants collaborated on the following narrative:

Dear Dr. King,

We stood the test of time and now it is time for us to prevail. I must say that I was truly dissatisfied with the racism that went on. I wanted to do everything in my power to stop racism and gain freedom and equality. In order to do this, I had to be grounded in my faith and stay strong. God would not let it happen for long. When people struggled, I knew a change was going to come and it would be magnificent. The struggle was to prepare us for something great that would be happening to us.

It might not happen next year or in twenty years, but I knew for sure there would be change and we would be treated as an equal to my fellow White neighbor. America selected an African-American president. I figured you would appreciate this remarkable time in history. You were determined to make the people of our nation aware of how poisonous racism can be. I believe now that people of all backgrounds are aware and attempting to make your dream come true. I love my nation but we still have work to do. The issues now are not just with race, but with religion, sexual orientation, gender, etc. I believe it would be of great justice to hear your speech again and people really comprehend your intended message.

Dr. King, you were, and still are, a historic leader in America. I was taught your beliefs throughout my scholastic career and soon, my children will be hearing similar lessons of your genuine character and heroic ways. I will always stand behind your dream and uphold these truths. I will always remember that weeping may endure for a night but joy will always come in the morning. I consider you the guiding light of a much needed movement and an icon for America forever. Thanks for being brave and standing for what you believed was right.

Following is a narrative written by the Caucasian participant, suggesting how

the Civil Rights movement brought about profound societal changes enjoyed by all citizens of the United States.

Segregation. I go to the lunch counter, and I see Black people sitting. They are taken away by police. They are not treated equally. I go to the Fox theatre, and they [Black people] have to enter through a different door. They cannot sit with us. They are not treated equally. I go to take and drink from the water fountain. They can't drink from the same one [as I]. They are not treated equally. I send my children to school. They [Black children] are not treated equally. I worry for their safety. They are not treated equally.

The Civil Rights Movement. Now, I see change. I go to a restaurant, and they [Black people] walk in beside me. We both sit down to a good meal. We are equal. I go to see a show at the Fox and they stand in line in front of me. They sit beside me. We are equal. I go to take a sip of water. They wait in the same line behind me. We are equal.

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