The monuments and memorials of mass incarceration and segregation through the lens of *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson

by Sarah Wallace, 2022 CTI Fellow
Hopewell High School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English 1, 9th Grade

Keywords: Racial Justice, Novel Study, Redlining, Racial Wealth Gap, Economic Effects of Racism, Slavery, The Holocaust, Lynching, Anti-Seminitism, Memorials, Monuments, Memory

Teaching Standards: See Appendix 1 for teaching standards addressed in this unit. (Insert a hyperlink to Appendix 1 where you've stated your unit's main standards.)

Synopsis: In this unit, students will read the novel *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson while focusing on the importance of memory and memorialization. Students will complete anticipation activities that research African-American and Jewish history, the racial groups that are represented by the protagonists of the novel. Students will explore how each racial group's history continues to have an impact on current events and the characters in the novel. Students will be asked to consider how history is taught to them and what they do and do not learn in a standard history class. The curriculum unit will include anticipatory material to be used before starting the novel, materials to supplement a nuanced discussion of the beginning of the novel, a project to enhance student understanding of characterization at the end of the novel, and finally a project that asks students to reflect on the historical implications of the racial groups that are represented in the novel. This unit aligns with the North Carolina English Language Arts standards for grades 9 and 10.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 25 students in **English I.**

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Introduction

Rationale

In an era where education and curriculum are under continued conversation, scrutiny, and legislation by the public and lawmakers, it is more important than ever that students are learning historical facts and critical thinking skills. Many people are unaware of historical events that have led to modern discrimination and hardship of minority groups. This is often because of a lack of societal conversation of a subject, inadequate education, or the lack of memorialization and museums built for a given event. More insidiously, much of the history around minority experiences, especially African American experiences, remains purposely obfuscated by those in power. Having a complete understanding of history, and history's effect on the present, is critical to students and society at large. Furthermore, it is equally important that students have access to a wide perspective of literature and stories. History class is not the only place that people can learn history; fictional narratives can also lead into nuanced discussion of politics, race, religion, sexuality, etc..

An effective way to integrate history and discussion into a classroom is through novel study. Reading a fictional narrative that is based in a real world situation with characters who think and feel can help students to develop stronger senses of empathy as they connect with the characters and the story. However, the current standardized English 1 curriculum that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools requires, Springboard, only has a reading guide and activity around the book *To Kill a Mockingbird. To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 by Harper Lee, a white woman. Furthermore, the principal protagonist, Atticus Finch, is a white man. This is the novel that is used in CMS and in school districts around the United States to initiate conversation about race and inequity in 2022. It is a book that at its conclusion gives the impression that racism has been solved and justice will prevail--this idea is diametrically opposite to the reality of present day United States. "In essence, *To Kill a Mockingbird* hasn't been embraced in our schools because it is 'an exercise in wish-fulfillment' in the words of critic Francine Prose, or because it's a particularly forceful rendering of racial injustice, but because it reimagines Southern history, American history, as something far more benign than its reality".[1]

One book among many that can lead to a more nuanced and accurate deception of modern day racial inequity is *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson, a woman of color. This novel centers teenage minority characters who experience the effects of racism, incarceration, and/or segregation. Furthermore, *If You Come Softly* has been approved by CMS to use in place of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the novel study in the Springboard English 1 curriculum. However,

[1] Ako-Adjei, Naa Baako. "Why It's Time Schools Stopped Teaching To Kill a Mockingbird." Transition, no. 122 (2017): 182–200. https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.122.1.24.

teachers have not been provided with supplemental reading guides and activities for it. When students read this book, they are introduced to cultures, histories, and narratives that they might not otherwise be exposed to. For example, *If You Come Softly* introduces characters who are African-American, Jewish, and LGBTQIA+, all of whom are groups who have (or currently do) experience discrimination that leads to incarceration and/or segregation.

The novel provides ample room for discussion and sociological criticism within the classroom. Therefore, this curriculum unit contains an anticipation guide which explore the history and present day struggles of the two primary minority groups represented in *If You Come Softly*: African-Americans and Jews, along with the memorials and museums that have (or have not) been erected in remembrance of important events of each group in history; subsequently, providing students the opportunity to reflect on their own culture's similar or different experiences. The importance of this cannot be understated. An accurate telling of minority history is grossly underrepresented in American history classes, memorial landscapes, and museums. As Richard Rothstein writes, "[i]f young people are not taught an accurate account of how we came to be segregated, their generation will have little chance of doing a better job of desegregating than the previous ones".[2] For example, one of the protagonists of the novel, Jeremiah, is from Fort Green, Brooklyn, a major historic Black neighborhood in New York City which become a segregated neighborhood during World War II because of discriminatory real estate practices and zoning laws. This character's home can serve as the beginning of education and discussion around the forced segregation that took place in the United States and that is rarely talked about. Therefore, *If You Come Softly* is a novel that can contribute to conversations about different marginalized groups and allow students whose identities are not represented in the book to draw parallels to their own lives.

Demographics

Hopewell High School is situated in Huntersville, North Carolina with 1,754 students currently enrolled. Of those students, 47.9% are African American, 24.2% are white, and 20.6% are Hispanic. Students who are more than one race, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander take up the remaining 7.3% of the student population. While the stories and histories of those who are American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other are also of critical importance, this CU 'will focus on the largest minority demographic groups represented at Hopewell: African Americans and Hispanics. These students exist and interact with each other on a daily basis, however, each have very different histories and experiences within the United States. Furthermore, the variety of histories and experiences of different ethnic groups and races are not typically talked about in the classroom. Students are taught about history with a bird's eye view and many of the atrocities that have been committed on American soil are glossed over or not spoken about at all. The lack of conversation around the way minority groups have been and continue to be treated in the United States contributes to a lack of empathy and understanding for the experiences of others while simultaneously deepening the divide between these ethnicities. This divide is one that can begin to be addressed through education.

Like many high schools in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, EL (English Learner) students at Hopewell High School are provided with the option to take English 1 in a class with

[2] Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

all other EL students in order to provide a space for them to use their entire linguistic repertoire and be receive instruction that focuses on content over language. This class will be taught in the Spring at Hopewell to an English 1 class that is 91% Hispanic. Creating an additional unit to use while reading *If You Come Softly* provides teachers with supplemental materials that they can use to facilitate a deeper understanding of both the books and the minority groups that it represents. Additionally, because at most schools, English 1 for ELs is predominately taken by Latinx students, this unit will also provide them with the opportunity to connect to discriminatory parallels that they themselves have experienced, as well as introducing the history of other marginalized groups that is not often taught in schools.

Objectives

The goal of this curriculum unit is for students to have an understanding of the history of the two main minority groups represented in *If You Come Softly*: African-Americans and Jews. Discussions of the LGBTQ+ community and its history are also relevant; however, because the main characters of *If You Come Softly* are Black and Jewish, the focus of the unit lies with them. The lessons will explore the history and memorialization of mass incarceration and segregation that each group endured and the social standing and experiences of each group in present day. Students will then engage in discussions centered around the two main characters of *If You Come Softly*, Jeremiah and Ellie. The unit will analyze three different moments of incarceration and/or segregation for each minority group mentioned above as well as memorials and monuments that venerate and/or memorialize the eras. Students will also be asked to examine what monuments and/or memorials do *not* exist to mark significant history. Furthermore, students will be asked to reflect on their prior knowledge for specific historical events, and how the role of different museums and memorials play a role in whether the students were aware of the event or not. The following events and subsequent memorials will be included:

	African-Americans	**Jews**
Incarceration	Slavery The Transatlantic Slave Trade exhibit by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo	The Holocaust The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Trauma Sites
Segregation	Redlining and Racial Zoning Laws Brooklyn Village Historic Markers in Charlotte, NC	Jewish isolation and quotas in pre-Holocaust Europe Venetian Jewish Ghetto
Terror	Modern Policing and the Black Lives Matter Movement Black Lives Matter Plaza and Say Their Names Memorials	21st Century Antisemitism Tree of Life Memorial, Pittsburgh, PA

The information provided in this unit can be used to cover all of the events and monuments for a wider perspective, or can be used to choose individual sections for a more detailed and nuanced view of specific events.

This curriculum unit will end with a final project and/or discussion that requires students to conduct their own research of the history and current events of marginalized groups. In addition, students will be asked to design their own monument or memorial for the person, place, or event of their choosing. The goal of the unit is not for students to leave with a sense of hopelessness that systemic imbalances of power will always exist, but rather for them to learn from the mistakes of the past and to know that they can do better than past generations.

Content Research

Introduction

Humans have always memorialized what is important to them. Cave paintings over 40,000 years old have been found in Sulawesi, an island near Indonesia. These paintings, known as prehistoric rock art, represent pigs which was most likely a reflection of the "Neolithic" farming traditions of the time.[3] To farming societies, livestock and animals were important to survival. Over 4,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, pyramids were erected to memorialize pharaohs and shepherd them into the afterlife. Chaco Canyon, located in modern day New Mexico, includes a network of structures that were most likely used to maintain a thriving economy and complex religious tradition.[4] While the purpose of memorials and monuments has varied over time from marking the importance of livestock to honoring gods, they are a consistent part of human civilization.

However, while the monuments themselves usually do not change over time, the perspectives, perceived meanings, and historical context are constantly in flux. This is particularly true in terms of the monuments and memorials in the United States that are related to race and racial history. For example, conversation around Confederate statues and memorials has become increasingly contentious and contested in mainstream media. While this perspective is one that has always been shared within the Black community, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests brought the issue into the modern zeitgeist. Education around why, and more importantly, when these statues exist has begun to permeate pockets of education and social discourse. Only 171 Confederate statues and memorials are documented as being erected before 1900. In contrast, over 1,100 were built in 1900 or later.[5] Furthermore, data shows significant increases in monument dedication in two distinct periods: from 1900 to 1920 and during the 1950s and 1960s. These eras are significant significant periods in African-American history. 1900 to 1920 shows the enacting and enforcement of Jim Crow laws while 1950 to 1960 marks the rise of the Civil Rights movement.[6] However, there are ample examples of individuals maintaining that Confederate statues are an intrinsic part of the history of the United states--a paradox considering that only a small portion of the memorials were actually erected during the Civil War era.[7] Therefore, it is important to learn, discuss, and teach

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[3] Brumm, Adam, Adhi Agus Oktaviana, Basran Burhan, Budianto Hakim, Rustan Lebe, Jian-xin Zhao, Priyatno Hadi Sulistyarto, et al. "Oldest Cave Art Found in Sulawesi." Science Advances 7, no. 3 (January 13, 2021): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abd4648.
[4] "Chaco Culture." UNESCO. World Heritage Convention. Accessed October 19, 2022.
[5] "Whose Heritage SF." Southern Poverty Law Center, July 27, 2018.
[6] "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy." Southern Poverty Law Center, February 1, 2019.
[7] Confederacy: Last Week Tonight. YouTube. HBO, 2017. youtube.com/watch?v=J5b_-TZwQ0I.

what the monuments and memorials are that society chooses to glorify, why they are venerated, and the impact that sanitizing history currently has on society and will have on future generations.

Most people, similar to the characters in *If You Come Softly*, are ignorant of significant moments in minority history. In other words, they do not have a comprehensive understanding of the history of the United States and its peoples. This ignorance comes from inadequate education, the persisting power of white supremacy, and the sanitization of history by colonists and conquerors. Therefore, education is needed so that people understand the historical structures that have existed and continue to exist in order disenfranchise minority groups and maintain the current status quo. Not only does education help to inform, it can also allow people to develop empathy and understanding towards those who are not like them. However, this type of education cannot just exist at the school level (and often does not even exist there); learning about minority history requires society as a whole to reckon with past and current policies that have contributed to the incarceration, segregation, and terrorism of minority groups and individuals in the United States.

The Unspoken History of Minority Groups in *If You Come Softly*

Both African Americans and Jews have long and complex histories. This history is made even more complicated by the clinical, historical narratives that are presented by society, specifically in the United States. Nuance is rarely taught, especially in foundational education, and stories of racism, incarceration, and terrorism are presented as if they are relics of an ancient past rather than systems that have radically shaped modern day society. For example, in American high schools, Jewish history is taught only in the broad strokes--in the 1940s, Adolf Hitlor gained power, forced Jews into concentration camps and murdered them until the United States became involved in World War II in 1941. There is no mention of the prior segregation and ghettoization of Jews throughout Europe nor discussion of the increase of anti-Semitic actions and terrorization in the modern day.

Similar disparities exist in the teaching of African American and Black history. The education is largely sanitized and students are typical left with the highlights of African American history being that enslaved people were brought from Africa, forced to work on plantations until the end of the Civil War where all enslaved people were immediately freed. After the Civil War, most stories of Black history are glossed over until the Civil Rights Era where students are given the impression that after Black Americans were granted the right to vote, equality existed for both races. While a majority of these these events did happen, there is an incredible lack of nuance and detail that is not taught public high schools in the United States. The fault does not necessarily lie with teachers, but rather with the institutions that create educational standards and determine how much or how little of history should be taught. However, it is of critical importance that this nuance is taught because its absence perpetuates the mistreatment of all minority groups.

African-Americans

Statistics show that minority groups, both in the past and in present day, are incarcerated at a higher rate than their majority counterparts--typically straight, white men and women. The

groups affected most by this equality are African Americans and Hispanics. For example, "32% of the US population is represented by African Americans and Hispanics, compared to 56% of the US incarcerated population being represented by African Americans and Hispanics."[8] There is a higher representation of African Americans and Hispanics in prison than exists in the larger U.S. population. While this statistic is troubling enough, the larger conversation around *why* this statistic is the reality is even more troubling. According to the Pew Research Center, only 32% of white people, compared to 79% of Black people say "the way racial and ethnic minorities are treated by the criminal justice system is a very big problem in the United States today."[9] This difference in opinion is no doubt a result from lack of education and history of the long history of the incarceration of African-Americans.

For African-Americans, modern day incarceration trends stem both from slavery and the creation of the slave patrols that were instituted in the early 1700s in order to stop slave uprisings and return escaped slaves to their owners. Unlike other types of law enforcement, slave patrols existed only to police and punish enslaved people, and therefore existed only to police and punish African-Americans. Furthermore, these patrols acted without any larger oversight which bred particularly egregious behavior from them. Former slave Lewis Clarke described the patrols as:

> …the offscouring of all things; the refuse,...the ears and tails of slavery;...the tooth and tongues of serpents. They are the very fool's cap of baboons,...the wallet and satchel of polecats, the scum of stagnant pools, the exuvial, the worn-out skins of slaveholders. (T)hey are the meanest, and lowest, and worst of all creation. Like starved wharf rats, they are out nights, creeping into slave cabins, to see if they have an old bone there; they drive out husbands from their own beds, and then take their places.[10]

Descriptions such as this one, other accounts by enslaved people, and accurate descriptions of what they had to endure are not typically the focus of education around slavery. For example, the word "slavery" only appears 12 in the North Carolina Unpacking Document for American History. Eight of those instances shows the word appearing in "Example Topics" category. Yet the institution and consequences of slavery and the continued incarceration of African-Americans are as much a part of American history as the concept of freedom, a term that appears 27 times in the same Unpacking Document.[11] Slavery is taught to students, but in a predominantly abstract way. Focus is given to the major events of slavery but ignores the personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the individuals that experienced it.

The pedagogical decisions around educating students about slavery no doubt has grown out of the United States' refusal to reckon with the human suffering and genocide that was

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[8] "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," NAACP (NAACP, November 4, 2022).
[9] John Gramlich, "From Police to Parole, Black and White Americans Differ Widely in Their Views of Criminal Justice System," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, August 27, 2020).
[10] Philip L. Reichel, "Southern Slave Patrols as a Transitional Police Type," American Journal of Police 7, no. 2 (1988): 51-78.
[11] "American History Unpacking Document," North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, July 15, 2021, https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/12223/open.

caused by the institution of slavery. Bryan Stevenson writes, "In other parts of the world, cultural institutions committed to truth telling about horrific histories of oppression, genocide, and human suffering provide critically important healing and transformation….In America, we have resisted this reckoning."[12] When people remain ignorant of the past, whether by choice or by circumstance, society will never be able to come to terms with past atrocities nor have the tools needed in order to make a difference in the future.

In this same vein, most people do not realize that even though slavery was legally abolished does not mean that the institution suddenly came tumbling down. The slave patrols that terrorized African-Americans during slavery transitioned into "militia-style groups who were empowered to control and deny access to equal rights to freed slaves"after the Civil War and during reconstruction. These groups "relentlessly and systematically enforced Black Codes, strict local and state laws that regulated and restricted access to labor, wages, voting rights, and general freedoms for formerly enslaved people."[13] When Black Codes were outlawed in 1868 along with the addition of the 14th amendment, states and local governments quickly pivoted towards Jim Crow laws. Furthermore, "By the 1900s, local municipalities began to establish police departments to enforce local laws in the East and Midwest, including Jim Crow laws. Local municipalities leaned on police to enforce and exert excessive brutality on African Americans who violated any Jim Crow law."[14] However, terrorization from local police departments was not what spurred the extensive era of segregation that spread across the United States during the Jim Crow era.

The segregation of communities by race in the United States is almost exclusively caused by government assistance programs that favored white Americans, banking policies that predominantly benefited white Americans, and neighborhood zoning laws that excluded Black Americans. One prominent example of neighborhood laws that directly targeted Black Americans and grossly contributed to mass segregation was the creation the Federal Housing Administration. The FHA was created in order to stabilize and grow the housing market after The Great Depression. However, the organization completed its own appraisals of properties before they were insured and the their appraisal standards "included a whites-only requirement".[15] This precondition meant that racial segregation was an official policy for properties to be covered by the federal mortgage insurance program. Furthermore, the FHA, a governmental organization, "favored mortgages in areas where boulevards or highways served to separate African American families from whites."[16] After World War II, when suburbanization became more popular across the country, new developments were built with racial covenants written in housing deeds. These racial covenants dictated strict and bigoted terms for the purchase of property. For example, "the FHA recommended that deeds to properties for which it issued mortgage insurance should include an explicit prohibition of resale to African Americans."[17] These policies were instituted in suburbs throughout the United States "with the

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[12] Equal Justice Initiative. The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration. Montgomery, AL: EJI, 2021.
[13] "The Origins of Modern Day Policing," NAACP, December 3, 2021.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corp. 2017, 64.
[16] Ibid, 65.
[17] Ibid, 84.

FHA administering an explicit racial policy that solidified segregation in every one of our metropolitan areas."[18] The longstanding effects of this are such that most African Americans were not able to build up generational wealth post WWII like similarly positioned white families were able to do. Black families were forced by governmental policy to live in poorly constructed, often over crowded, housing complexes which created segregated neighborhoods that exist to this day.

These racist, systemic, foundations are largely responsible for the modern Black Lives Matter movement as well as the controversy about whether schools should teach any version of Critical Race Theory. From modern police departments being descended from slave patrols, to the bigoted zoning and real estate practices that limited economic resources for African-Americans, the evidence that Black Americans have been disenfranchised at every step of their existence in the United States is indisputable. However, how this history and its modern implications are addressed, taught, and disseminated to the general public is still in flux.

Jews

While still taught in the vein of American Exceptionalism, the treatment of Jews is more readily addressed in American schools. Education of the Holocaust is more easily spoken about, most likely because it is more far removed from American History than slavery is. Students learn about the atrocities that were committed against the Jewish people. They are educated about internment camps, gas chambers, and forced labor. Elie Weisel's novel, *Night*, is frequently taught, and discussion of Anne Frank as a teenage hero is commonplace. However, even with high levels of education around the Holocaust than African-American slavery, there are still disparities in the public's knowledge and education of details about the Holocaust. The Pew Research Center reports that while 84% of the general American population are able to articulate what 'the Holocaust' refers to, only 45% are able to state how many Jews were killed during the Holocaust and only 43% are aware that Hitler became the chancellor of Germany through a democratic process.[19] So while education around the treatment of Jewish people during the 1930s and 1950s is more detailed than the mass incarceration and genocide of other groups, education around what caused those atrocities to happen and the extent to which people were affected is still lacking.

It is generally thought that Jewish ghettos were first created prior to World War II as a precursor to the Holocaust and subsequent concentration camps. However, the first Jewish ghetto was created long before that in 1442 in Frankfurt, Germany. While the word "ghetto" was not yet in use, the resettlement of Jews to one area in Frankfurt was the definition of what soon would be called the Jewish ghetto. The word "ghetto" came into use upon the creation of the Venetian Ghetto in 1516. Jews living in Venice were required to resettle in a single gated and walled community. Trade and free traffic was allowed during the day; however, at night the gates that

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[18] Ibid, 70.

[19] Becka A Alper et al., "What Americans Know about the Holocaust," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020).

surrounded the ghetto were locked and guarded.[20] While a centralized Jewish community at the center of Venice did allow for the Jewish culture to thrive and mix with the other cultures that existed in Venice, it was still a mandated relegation that limited true freedom.

Ghettos continued to exist throughout Europe because of the domination of Christianity around Europe. Up until the Holocaust, most forced relegation of Jews to individualized areas were orders from the religious government. For example, "In 1555, Pope Paul IV issued the 'Cum nimis absurdum' proclamation, which required the Jews of Rome to live in separate quarters and also severely restricted their rights….The purpose of this edict was to encourage conversion to Catholicism, an act that would serve as a ticket out of the ghetto."[21] While some ghettos were thriving areas of Jewish business and culture, many contained living conditions that were cramped and unsanitary. Any many ghettos, Jewish residents were forced to wear a badge or a yellow headdress, a practice that would be repeated by the Nazis in the 20th century.[22] Ghettoed areas continued to exist, especially in Italy, until 1797 when "Napoleon's troops brought an end to the Republic of Venice and to the ghetto; they burned down the gates, and French principles of liberty, equality and fraternity allowed the ghetto's inhabitants at last to be free and equal."[23] After 1797, Jews had greater freedom of movement in Italy and throughout Europe until the 1930s when race laws and anti-Seminitism became to rise again.

The next area of Jewish history is more well documented. It is what students learn about in schools and what is memorialized in museums around the world. From the museum and memorials at the trauma sites of concentration camps to the Imperial War Museum in London to the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the atrocities of the Holocaust are documented and taught to the masses. However, why and how the Holocaust was able to happen is less talked about. Centuries of anti-Semitism are glossed over in favor of the narrative that anti-Jewish sentiment was largely spread by Adolf Hitler and that after his death Jewish people simply returned to their everyday lives. While shades of this are true, this taught history does not account for the continued rise of anti-Semitism both after WWII and in present day.

The Anti-Defamation League counted 2,717 antisemitic incidents in 2021, a 34% increase from the prior year. This number is the highest amount of incidents since the ADL began tracking them in 1979.[24] The American Jewish Committee (AJC) most succinctly states the state of modern anti-Semitism:

> From deadly attacks like the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the 2019 Chabad Center shooting in Poway, California, to the 2022 hostage situation at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and the normalization in

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[20] Caravalho, Liah. "Understanding the Venetian Ghetto from a Historical and Literary Perspective." In Custodia Legis: Law Librarians of Congress. Library of Congress, March 21, 2017.
[21] Ratzabi, Hila. "Jewish Ghettos of Pre-Emancipation Europe." My Jewish Learning, July 18, 2019.
[22] Gransard, Marie-José. "500 Years of the Venetian Ghetto: Commemoration and History." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, March 30, 2016.
[23] Ibid.
[24] "Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents 2021." ADL, May 3, 2022.

> mainstream popular culture punctuated by the spread of antisemitic rhetoric by rapper Kanye West, basketball star Kyrie Irving, and comedian Dave Chappelle, hatred of the Jews continues to multiply in the United States.[25]

Anti-Semitic behavior ranges from deadly mass shootings to the spreading of bigoted misinformation by public figures. All forms of this anti-Semitic behavior echoes within the Jewish community creating a culture of fear and caution--feelings that have existed for hundreds of years. Therefore, understanding detailed histories of Jewish segregation and incarceration, and modern anti-Semitic rhetoric and terrorism are critical in changing attitudes and understanding the systemic issues that continue to affect Jews to this day.

Instructional Implementation

History is important. The details of history are important. What students are taught about systemic racism is important because it structures how they view their society and highlights mistakes that those in power have made in the past and continue to make. Critical understanding of not only what happened, but how it happened and how much society chooses to remember is important. Understanding historical context is critical for anyone reading texts that feature minority characters; however, it is especially important in an educational setting. Furthermore, knowledge of the intricacies of Black and Jewish history can make the discussion and examination of literature, including *If You Come Softly*, more relevant.

Teaching Strategies

This curriculum is structured as an anticipation guide and a guide for nuanced discussion and understanding of the prologue and the first four chapters of *If You Come Softly*. A variety of different teaching strategies will be used to introduce students to the novel, explain the historical context of the novel and its implications to current events, and facilitate academic discussions regarding memory and race.

An important strategy to incorporate into any discussion of new content is Think-Pair-Share. This technique helps to improve student engagement by allowing them to tap into what they already know, share and learn with a partner, and engage with the classroom community as a whole. This technique is also "an excellent means for teachers to monitor student understanding of the content or language objectives."[26] Teachers begin this activity by posing a question to the class. Students are giving sufficient time to develop their own individual answer. This can be done on notebook paper or a formalized worksheet. Students should be monitored to ensure that there is full participation. Students who are beginning Multilingual Learners (MLs) should be allowed to engage with the question in their L1 as the objective here is for complex thinking rather than direct language instruction. After documenting their own thoughts and ideas, students are asked to turn to a partner (assigned or student chosen) and share their ideas. Both students should share and be engaged. The teacher can reiterate that each

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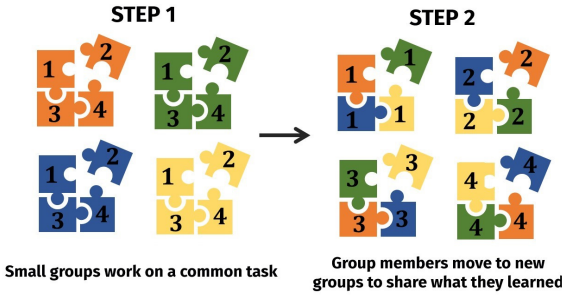
[25] "10 Tough Questions on Antisemitism Explained." AJC Global Voice. American Jewish Committee, November 8, 2022.

[26] Echevarría, Jana, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah Short. Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP® Model. Boston, MA: Pearson, 2013, 199.

person's unique experiences causes them to have ideas that others did not think of. Students should be encouraged to add to their own ideas using the information gained from their partner. Sharing with a partner also allows students to rehearse expression of their ideas. This strategy can be especially helpful for Multilingual Learners who often struggle with confidence in expressing their ideas to a large group. Finally, the teacher will facilitate a class discussion by calling on individual students and/or partners and asking them to share their answers and ideas. For a deeper class discussion, students can also be asked to take notes on answers that are given to the entire class. Think-Pair-Share is an incredibly valuable activity as it "gives *all* of the students a chance to think and speak about the topic, instead of just two or three."[27]

A strategy that can be particular beneficial to Multilingual Learners, as well as any students who might be struggling to read a text is a Jigsaw Reading Activity. This strategy allows students to break complex texts up into manageable chunks, subsequently giving them the time to understand and interact with the assigned text in a deeper manner. Jigsaw Reading also promotes groupwork and collaboration among students. A visual of grouping strategies is provided here:



[28]

To begin this activity, the teacher must select the text that students will be reading and divide it into manageable chunks. This can be done by giving groups individual paragraphs and/or assigning them themed sections of the text. Students are then assigned an expert group and all given the same text chunk to read and analyze. Groups can read the text by each member taking a turn, partners reading to each other, or each member reading silently. "Following the reading, each 'expert' group reviews and discusses what was read, determining the essential information and key vocabulary. You may have a worksheet for them to complete to record key information."[29] Students can complete the worksheet or group activities together, but the teacher should carefully monitor to make sure that all members of the expert group understand the material and are not just copying and regurgitating information. When the teacher is confident that each student understands their assigned information, they will move to a new group where each member now has a different chunk of the original text. Students will then teach their new group members what they have learned. Students can record the information they are learning from their new group members on a graphic organizer, if desired.

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[27] Ibid, 199.
[28] Bayraktar, Breana. "Tip: Using a Jigsaw Activity." Tips for Teaching Professors, October 12, 2021.
[29] Echevarría, Jana, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah Short. Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP® Model. Boston, MA: Pearson, 2013, 45.

A third activity and strategy that can be extremely beneficial for students to use to understand point of view and characterization is a Mind Mirror. Matthew Tulley, an English as a Second Language teacher, reflects on the benefits of the Mind Mirror activity, "I used a mind mirror project to help students synthesize key story elements to create a visual representation of the character's perspective. My goal was to lead students to develop critical thinking skills. Towards this end, student feedback suggested that mind mirror projects can help students become self-aware, confident, and autonomous critical thinkers."[30] To create a Mind Mirror, students should be given poster paper and told to draw the outline of a head on the paper. If desired, the teacher can draw the head outlines beforehand in order to reduce the amount of in class time used working on the project. Students then choose or are assigned a character from the text that is being read. Students can create their own individual Mind Mirrors, or work in partners or small groups. The Mind Mirror is a reflection of that character's thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences. A basic Mind Mirror typically requires the following elements for students to incorporate into their work:

- Name of the character
- Two quotations from the character that represents their personality/characterization
- Two original student written statements that analyze the character's goals, desires, conflicts, personality, etc.
- Two symbols that represent the character's beliefs and/or experiences
- Two drawings that depict scenes from the character's life

However, the required elements can be modified to best fit the novel and character that has been assigned. Creating a Mind Mirror requires each student to take a more focused and critical read of the text. They are able to engage with the character more directly rather than simply imagining the character as an abstract idea. Students can also be given the opportunity to practice their oral presentation skills by presenting their Mind Mirrors to the class. Additionally, creating a Mind Mirror can give students the opportunity to explore character growth in a story. Students can create a Mind Mirror at the beginning of the story and then again at the end, and compare the differences between both versions of the character. In sum, this technique can show "students how to read between the lines in order to describe a character's point of view in terms of what that character says, thinks, and does throughout a story. Moreover, by increasing student confidence, self-awareness, and autonomy, this project prepared students to monitor and improve their critical thinking skills in future academic tasks."[31]

Classroom Lessons/Activities

All of the above mentioned teaching strategies will be incorporated into this unit. However, students will be introduced to the novel by reading the prologue and then completing a prediction activity. Prediction is an important reading skill and many students do not feel confident when using it because they do not want to be wrong. It is important to teach that the objective is not to be right or wrong, but to begin utilizing inference skills. Students can also have a discussion about the last three paragraphs of the prologue. Here, Elisha's mother tells her to "Remember what you can," which is then repeated by Elisha's narration.[32] This can lead to a discussion about

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[30] Tully, Matthew M. 2009. "Mind Mirror Projects: A Tool for Integrating Critical Thinking into the English Language Classroom." English Teaching Forum 47 (1): 10–17.
[31] Ibid, 13
[32] Woodson, Jacqueline. *If You Come Softly*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998, 2.

the importance of memory, what types of individual history and family history people choose to remember as well as events and people that society includes in its collective memory. A handout to facilitate this conversation can be found in Appendix II, entitled “Memory Matrix.”

After the prologue and Memory Matrix worksheet, students will complete a KWL (Know, Want, Learn) Chart about their knowledge of the history of African-Americans and Jews. Students will complete the first two columns, “know” and “want to know.” The “learn” column should be left blank and student responses saved to complete again at the end of the chapter 2 activities. Student responses to the KWL chart will most likely indicate knowledge of African-American slavery and The Holocaust. A discussion can then begin to address why these two events are the most commonly known parts of African-American and Jewish history. The teacher should also point out that these two eras of history are considered to have a clear beginning, middle, and end and that modern issues of discrimination and prejudice are usually talked about as separate problems, rather than a result of the long term suffering of both racial groups. A worksheet containing a KWL chart and with prompts to facilitate this discussion can be found in Appendix III.

After this discussion, students will progress into Chapter 1 of the novel. However, they will begin by reading only the first paragraph:

> Jeremiah was black. He could feel it. The way the sun pressed down hard and hot on his skin in the summer. Sometimes it felt like he sweated black beads of oil. He felt warm, inside his skin, protected. And in Fort Green, Brooklyn--where everyone seemed to be some shade of black--he felt good walking through the neighborhood.[33]

This initial paragraph alone provides opportunities for lessons on figurative language, historical context, and social discussions of race. The focus here will be on the historical context and racial discussions. Students will begin by completing a “Think, Pair, Share” activity (Appendix IV). They will consider the question of why the author, Woodson, begins the novel with the sentence, “Jeremiah was black.” His race is the first thing that is learned about him as a character. Students will think about and discuss why Woodson puts this information at the forefront of the novel.

Next, students will engage in a Jigsaw Reading Activity in order to provide historical context to the sentence, “And in Fort Green, Brooklyn--where everyone seemed to be some shade of black--he felt good walking through the neighborhood.”[34] Before the Jigsaw Activity, the class should engage in a discussion of why many people still live in segregated neighborhoods. Students can comment if they live in neighborhoods with people who are predominately of the same race. If they do, a discussion of why that is true can ensue. After the discussion, students will read an article entitled, “Redlining's legacy: Maps are gone, but the problem hasn't disappeared.”[35] Including the introduction, there are five sections in the article. These sections can be used for the Jigsaw activity; after the Jigsaw activity, if desired, students can complete assessment questions on the website, CommonLit, where the article is located.

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[33] Woodson, Jacqueline. *If You Come Softly*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998, 5.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Brooks, Khristopher J. “Redlining's Legacy: Maps Are Gone, but the Problem Hasn't Disappeared.” CommonLit, 2020.

CommonLit also contains related media that can be used to enhanced students' understanding of the text. After completing the Jigsaw activity, students should finish reading chapter one. The pacing and pedagogy of reading the first chapter is up to teacher discretion.

Chapter two of *If You Come Softly* introduces the character of Ellie in more detail than the prologue. As students read the chapter, the teacher should draw attention to references of Ellie's and her family's Judaism on pages 23 and 30. At this point students should engage in an KWL (Know, Want, Learn) chart in order to gauge their preexisting knowledge of Jews and provide them with an opportunity to learn more about a group that is not often talked about outside the context of The Holocaust. Students will then complete another Jigsaw activity with the CommonLit article, Segregated From Its History, How 'Ghetto' Lost Its Meaning, taken from an NPR article of the same name.[36] Students can then complete a Venn Diagram, either independently or in partners, comparing the treatment of African Americans and Jews in both Jigsaw articles.

A novel study of *If You Come Softly* should then progress normally with the teacher drawing attention to moments where race and racial differences are addressed in the book. Additionally, focus should be brought to any conversations around memory, either personal or historical. Furthermore, after sufficient discussion on the characterization of Miah and Ellie, students should be asked to complete a mind mirror to further explore these characters and their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Students can also create mind mirrors for secondary characters in the book. Project instructions and a rubric for a Mind Mirror can be found in Appendix V. After completion of the Mind Mirror, the teacher and students should continue with a standard novel study, again drawing attention to any parts that discussion memory and/or race.

The novel study will culminate in a project that discusses chapters 23-25 of *If You Come Softly* as well as discussions of modern policing and terrorization of African-Americans and Jews. It is important for the teacher and students to have a nuanced and supportive discussion of these chapters given Jeremiah's abrupt murder by a police officer. It is strongly recommended that students be given the opportunity to free write about their thoughts and feelings of the ending of the book, especially if the book is being read by students of color who often experience negative interactions with police and law enforcement. Students will then engage in a final project which ties together the African-American and Jewish history that was learned while reading the novel, discussions of race and memory that took place during the novel, and research on the Black Lives Matter movement and the rise of 21st century Anti-Semitisim. The aim of the project is to allow students to reflect on the plot of the book, make connections between the book and real life, and understand how education and memory largely influence the treatment of minority groups. Instructions for the final project can be found in Appendix VI.

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[36] Domonoske, Camila. "Segregated from Its History, How 'Ghetto' Lost Its Meaning." NPR. NPR, April 27, 2014.

Appendix I: Teaching Standards

- RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme

- RL.9-10.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time create effects such as mystery, tension, or surprise

- W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- W.9-10.5 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

- WH.B.2.2 Explain how competing religious, secular, racial, ethnic, and tribal group identities have impacted societies, now and in the past.

- WH.B.2.3 Explain the impact of global interaction on the development of national, tribal, and ethnic identities, now and in the past.

- WH.H.1.3 Explain how ethnocentrism, stereotypes, xenophobia, and racism impact human rights and social justice of various groups, tribes, and nations around the world, now and in the past.

- WH.H.1.4 Distinguish the challenges indigenous peoples and ethnic and tribal groups around the world have experienced as a result of colonization, imperialism, and assimilation, now and in the past.

Appendix II

Name:
Date:

MEMORY MATRIX

After reading the prologue to If You Come Softly, make a prediction about the outcome of the novel. Don't worry about being right or wrong, just write what you think will happen.

In the prologue, Elisha's mom tells her to "Remember what you can." Answer each of the questions in the boxes below about different things we do and do not remember.

What is your favorite memory? Why do you remember it?	What is the most important thing you know about your country's or culture's history?
What do you know about your family's personal history? If you don't know anything, why is that?	Do you think you learn everything you need to learn in your history classes? Why or why not?

Appendix III

Name:
Date:

KWL CHART AND RACE DISCUSSION

Consider what you have learned about the history of African-Americans. Also think about what you do **not** know about this history of African-Americans. Complete the first two columns of this chart writing what you know and what you want to know about African-American history.

What do you **know**?	What do you **want to know**?	What did you **learn**?

Consider what you have learned about the history of Jews. Also think about what you do **not** know about this history of Jews. Complete the first two columns of this chart writing what you know and what you want to know about Jewish history.

What do you **know**?	What do you **want to know**?	What did you **learn**?

Class Discussion Questions

- 💬 Think about what you wrote in the "know" column. Where did you learn this? Do you think you learned a complete history of this?
- 💬 Do you think the history you wrote in the "know" column has any effect on the treatment of African-Americans or Jews today? Why or why not?
- 💬 Most of what people are taught and asked to remember about these two groups are traumatic events. Do you think it is also important to learn about important figures, culture, and positive moments in history? Why or why not? Why do you think we do not normally learn this type of history?

Appendix IV

Name:
Date:

THINK-PAIR-SHARE ACTIVITY

Think

The first sentence of the first chapter is "Jeremiah was black." Why do you think Jacqueline Woodson (the author) starts the story by telling us that Jeremiah is black? Why is his race important? Write your thoughts in the box below.

Pair

Discuss your answer with a partner. Write down what you learned from your partner's answer. Do not just copy what they wrote.

Partner's Name:	

Share

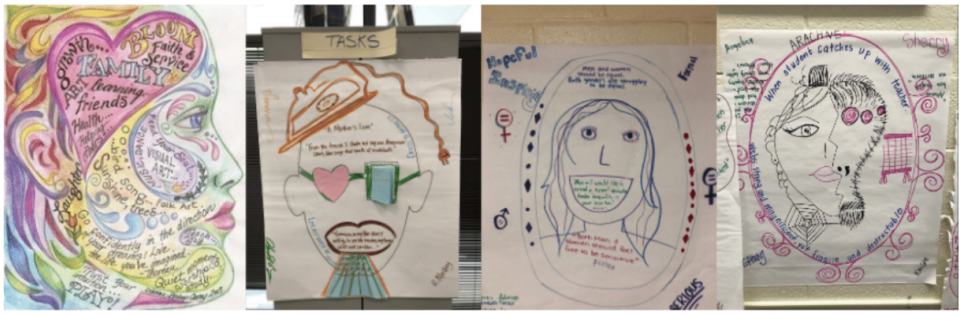
Using your original answer and what you learned from your partner, write a new response that you can share with the class.

Appendix V

MIND MIRROR INSTRUCTIONS AND RUBRIC

You will create a mind mirror to explore a character from *If You Come Softly*. Choose a complex character for your project. A complex character has many different sides or layers to their personality. Miah and Ellie are both examples of complex character in *If You Come Softly*.

Imagine the character is looking into a mirror, but instead of their face, they see their inner thoughts and personality. Here are some examples of how you can design your Mind Mirror.



Your Mind Mirror should include the following:

- Name of your character
- Two symbols that best represent this characters beliefs and personality
- Two drawings that depict the character's life. What are they doing? Where are they? Etc.
- Two adjectives that describe this character's feelings or actions
- Two quotations from the book that describe this character's personality, beliefs, and/or feelings
- Two statements that describe how you feel about this character.
    - Ex. "I think that this character…"

MIND MIRROR RUBRIC	Points Possible	Points Earned
Character's Name	10	
Two Symbols	12	
Two Drawings	12	
Two Adjectives	12	
Two Quotations	20	
Two Statements	20	
Colorful, Organized, Professional	14	
	100	

Appendix VI

"If You Come Softly" Final Project

Objective: You will create a research project that reflects on the history of African-Americans and Jews, modern issues affecting African-Americans and Jews, and the events of *If You Come Softly.*

Part A: You will be assigned a period of history for either African-Americans or Jews to research as well as a monument or memorial that has been built to memorialize that history.

Historical Research Choices	
African-Americans	**Jews**
Slavery - The Transatlantic Slave Trade exhibit by Kwame Akota-Bamfo	Jewish isolation and quotas in pre-Holocaust Europe - Venetian Jewish Ghetto
Lynching and Jim Crow Laws - The National Memorial for Peace and Justice	The Holocaust - The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Redlining and Racial Zoning Laws - Brooklyn Village Historic Markers in Charlotte, NC	

Current Event Research

If you were assigned a period of African-American history to research, you will also research the Black Lives Matter movement and Black Lives Matter Plaza and Say Their Names Memorials. If you were assigned a period of Jewish history to research, you will also research 21st Anti-Semitism including synagogue bombings and the Tree of Life Memorial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Consider the following questions while completing your research:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- Who had power? Who did not have power?
- Why did it happen?
- What was the most surprising or interesting thing you discovered during your research?

Part B: Create a Google Slides presentation to present the research that you completed in **Part A.** Use a slides template from www.slidesgo.com or www.slidescarnival.com to ensure that your presentation is organized and professional. Your presentation should include the following:

- Title slide including your topic and your name
- A summary, in your own words, of what happened during the historical era
- Relevant dates
- At least one image or picture on every slide
- How has this period of history had an effect on modern day society?
- Description of your assigned memorial
- Why was this memorial built? Who built it?
- How do you think people benefit from visiting this memorial?
- A summary, in your own words, of your assigned current event
- How has this event impacted daily life for people?
- What similarities and differences are there between the current event and the events in *If You Come Softly*?

Part C: Design or describe your own memorial. This can be a memorial for a character from the book, someone in your own life, a person you admire, or an important historical event that you feel should be recognized either in the United States or in another country. **You can create a visual representation of your memorial or you can describe it; however, your description must be detailed.** Answer the following questions about your memorial:

1. Who or what are you memorializing?
2. Why does this person, place, or thing need to be memorialized? In other words, why is it important?/Why are they important?
3. What type of memorial will you create? Ex. statue, art, plaque, etc.
4. What is its size?
5. Will there be any words on the memorial? If yes, what are the words? If no, why not?
6. Where will your memorial be located?
7. How will you convince people to come visit your memorial?

Materials List

The following items will be necessary for each student to have to complete the lessons and activities in this curriculum unit:

- A copy of *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson
- Copies of the worksheets included in the appendices
- Pen or pencil
- Digital Device such a Chromebook

Student Resources

- Memory Matrix Worksheet
- KWL Chart and Race Discussion Worksheet
- Think-Pair-Chair Activity Worksheet
- Mind Mirror Instructions and Rubric
- "If You Come Softly" Final Project Instructions
- *Behind You* by Jacqueline Woodson - Students who are particularly engaged in the novel might be interested in the novel's sequel, from Jeremiah's perspective
- Links to assist students with their final project research:
    - The Slave Trade and Slavery
    - The Transatlantic Slave Trade Exhibit
    - Kwame Akoto-Bamfo
    - History of Lynching in the United States
    - The National Memorial for Peace and Justice Museum
    - Racist Housing Policies and Climate Effects
    - Summary of *The Color of Law*
    - Charlotte's Historic Brooklyn Neighborhood
    - Charlotte's Brooklyn Neighborhood Tour
    - History of Jewish Ghettos
    - History of the Venetian Ghetto
    - Venice Ghetto Tour
    - Life Before the Holocaust
    - Anti-Jewish Legislation in Pre-War Germany
    - History of The Holocaust
    - United States Holocaust and Memorial Museum

Teacher Resources

- *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein - A well researched and well written book, reading this can provide context for teachers who may not know much about redlining or the racist zoning practices that were endorsed by the United States government.
- KnowCLT App - This app was created for people to be able to explore Brooklyn Village, Charlotte's historic Black neighborhood. The app is meant to be used during a walking tour of Brooklyn (now uptown Charlotte); however, it can also be used to browse information about the area.

Notes

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[2] Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.
[3] Brumm, Adam, Adhi Agus Oktaviana, Basran Burhan, Budianto Hakim, Rustan Lebe, Jian-xin Zhao, Priyatno Hadi Sulistyarto, et al. “Oldest Cave Art Found in Sulawesi.” Science Advances 7, no. 3 (January 13, 2021): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abd4648.
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[6] “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy.” Southern Poverty Law Center, February 1, 2019.
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[8] “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet,” NAACP (NAACP, November 4, 2022),
[9] John Gramlich, “From Police to Parole, Black and White Americans Differ Widely in Their Views of Criminal Justice System,” Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, August 27, 2020).
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[11] “American History Unpacking Document,” North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, July 15, 2021, https://www.dpi.nc.gov/media/12223/open.
[12] Equal Justice Initiative. The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration. Montgomery, AL: EJI, 2021.
[13] “The Origins of Modern Day Policing,” NAACP, December 3, 2021.
[14] Ibid
[15] Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corp. 2017, 64.
[16] Ibid, 65.
[17] Ibid, 84.
[18] Ibid, 70.
[19] Becka A Alper et al., “What Americans Know about the Holocaust,” Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020).
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[21] Ratzabi, Hila. “Jewish Ghettos of Pre-Emancipation Europe.” My Jewish Learning, July 18, 2019.
[22] Gransard, Marie-José. “500 Years of the Venetian Ghetto: Commemoration and History.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, March 30, 2016.
[23] Ibid.
[24] “Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents 2021.” ADL, May 3, 2022.
[25] “10 Tough Questions on Antisemitism Explained.” AJC Global Voice. American Jewish Committee, November 8, 2022.
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[33] Ibid, 5.
[34] Ibid.
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