



Searching for Change:

Exploring Historical Silences and Counter
Storytelling through Youth-Led Social Justice
Movements

Ariana Varela
avarela@usc.edu




Table of contents

01

Introduction

02

Pedagogy

03

Discussion &
Activities

04

Q&A

Introduction

- Information Literacy Instruction Librarian
- Primary Source Literacy
- Community Archives
- USC's Micro-seminar program for first-year USC students

Pedagogy

Historical Silences and Counter-Storytelling

- Dominant Narratives
- Silencing the Past by Michel-Rolph Trouillot
- Knowledge Justice edited by Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight

Active Learning and Student-Led Activities

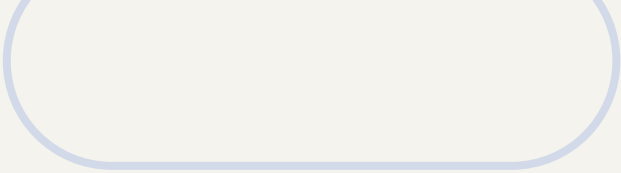
- Minimize database demonstrations and lecture, work towards group discussion and activities.
- Create a collaborative learning object driven by the students.

Community Initiatives

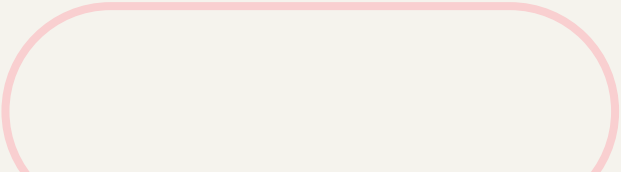
- Place information literacy skills in the context of issues impacting the communities they are moving to for undergrad.
- Demonstrate individuals their age who work towards making lasting change.

“Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter storytelling as part of critical race methodology for the social sciences, and more specifically, within education. It is a way to communicate the experiences of people who are considered marginal and unvalued by society. The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the [dominant white] stories of racial privilege.”

— Leung, S. Y., & López-McKnight, J. R. (Eds.). (2021). Knowledge Justice : Disrupting library and information studies through critical race theory. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11969.001.0001>



Discussions and Activities



Dominant Narratives

What important figures did you learn about in your high school history classes?



George Washington


Martin Luther King Jr.

Abraham Lincoln


US Presidents and founding fathers (Washington, Jefferson, etc), Popes, European kings and queens (Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria, all the Fredricks and Charles, etc), Inventors (divinchi, etc), Scientific thinkers (Galileo, etc) and artists

Malala, Martin Luther King Jr., U.S. Presidents and Vice Presidents/Founding Fathers, Harriet Tubman, Shakespeare, Biblical figures, Christopher Columbus (American "Trailblazers"), Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Hobbes and Locke, First Ladies

US presidents Carl MarxSitting Bull Aristotle Plato Socrates Fredrick Douglas George T downing Ella FitzgeraldRosa Parks Angela Davis



What are some ways we can expose, analyze, or challenge dominant narratives through counter-stories in academic spaces?



Critically Analyzing Primary Sources

Who are the individuals in this photo?

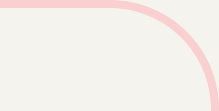


Critically Analyzing Primary Sources

- What is the item? Who created it?
- What kind of material is it created on?
- Who was the intended audience for this source?
- What is its historical context?
- Whose perspective is presented in the items? Whose perspective is missing?
- What questions came up for you when looking at or reading this item?

Collaborative Exhibit



- Apply the ideas of silenced histories, dominant narratives, and counter storytelling to youth movements in Los Angeles.
 - Participate in counter storytelling by analyzing images and adding them to a collaborative exhibit.
 - Practice the skills of critically analyzing primary sources to look for historical silences or push them into additional research.
- 

Watts Riots & Renaissance



Police surround and search men for weapons in the 1900 block on East 103rd Street in Watts. No weapons were found and the men were released.

Wesselmann, Cliff, 1965

Analysis

The Watts Riots were a physical, costly manifestation of building frustrations in the Watts Neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. Lasting six days, over a thousand people were injured in the struggle, 4,000 were arrested, and 34 people were killed. The riots were sparked by the public arrest and aggressive police mishandling of the Frye family, a Black family. The effects of the riots rippled through the LA area, prompting a 46 mile curfew and the arrival of the national guard. An official investigation ordered by Governor Pat Brown cited the riot as a result of high unemployment rates, neglected and inadequate housing, and poor schooling options, however, no action was taken by local officials to address these inequities.

Youth Justice Coalition



Youth Justice coalition was formed in Los Angeles County in 2001 in order to provide support for youth offenders across LA county. The group focuses mainly on four key points: exposing and dismantling the war on gangs as a war on youth of color, improving prison conditions, reducing LA county's use of prison and detainment, and transitioning to community outreach based alternatives. The YJC has helped their community through the FREE LA High School which helps LA youth who have been expelled to continue their education. FREE LA High School teaches its students basic life skills, as well as necessary skills to be a leader and have community outreach.

Takeaways

Successes

- Able to build rapport with first-year students
- Discuss information literacy topics in an engaging way, showing the broader implications of their research
- Students were thinking about who wrote the information they were using in their exhibits and where they could go for alternative perspectives for those who experience the issues being studied

Challenges

- Covering deep topics in a short amount of time
- Not having an assignment tied to the seminar, students opt in
- In the future, I would talk more about secondary sources and citations
- Consider having a co-facilitator

Thanks!

Questions?

avarela@usc.edu
