The background of the slide features a stylized, wavy American flag with stars and stripes in shades of blue, red, and white. The text is overlaid on this background.

Current Events In the APUSH Classroom

**A Strategy to increase student
interest in history**

**Rebecca Richardson,
Allen High School**

Agenda

- 1. General Introduction**
- 2. Discussion of one sample current event topic, the death of George Floyd**
- 3. Sample lesson**
- 4. Other potential topics/activities**
- 5. Food for Thought**
- 6. Questions and Answers**

Introduction

The value of social studies!!!

Many times social studies seem to get pushed aside by math, science, technology, and even English as if its focus was the least significant. Advocating for the study of history seems more important today than at any other time in our lives. The current state of our nation and world would benefit from the revelations history exposes. Quoting Theodore Roosevelt, “The more you know about the past, the better prepared you are for the future.”

We must institute a renewed championing of social studies. This may be challenging as many students are disinterested in history. Even if our schools do not embrace an added emphasis in social studies, as history teachers we should step up our efforts to be champions for it!

Sample Topic for Discussion

One of the many popular current event topics is the murder of George Floyd. There are so many more you could tap into, and as you get to know your students, you can develop lessons that connect to what they are interested in.



Starting the Discussion with Students

Some topics such as George Floyd's murder may already be "hot" in the classroom. Students will likely have opinions and knowledge without us having to educate them. However, a non-biased – fact based introduction can be useful in getting a conversation started.

If the discussion is too heated, remember to **reconnect students to their goal of historical analysis and contextual understanding**. Our main goal is increasing interest in history by showing how relevant it is. For example, if a student wants to start a debate as to whether or not Floyd's death was a racially motivated murder... or just murder... redirect them to the reaction. The goal of the lesson is not to debate the issue of race for the officers involved, the goal is the issue of race in our nation. The event is a stepping stone into history.

Starting the Discussion

George Floyd's arrest and death have been played and replayed... our students have probably seen it multiple times. To get the conversation started, you may want to present a simple headline or image. You may want to simply start by focusing on the reaction to his death.

Nationwide outrage

George Floyd's death in police custody sparked more than 550 protests, rallies and vigils across the country.



<https://www.nbcnews.com/george-floyd-death>

Connect the current event to your town.

Allen police chief 'outraged' by the death of George Floyd promises to review policies

Chief Brian Harvey issued a statement Tuesday detailing the department's procedures and said he would listen to community concerns.



The Allen Police Department issued a statement Tuesday detailing the department's current procedures and said it would listen to community concerns. (Tom Fox / Staff Photographer)

Antifa rumors led organizers to cancel Allen protest against police brutality

Two men rumored to be members of antifa attended a protest in the city Monday and urged protesters to block traffic, which police did not allow.



Aerial view of water tower and residential neighborhood in Allen, Texas on Tuesday, March 24, 2020. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)

How has this event affected our country? What are the major issues being discussed?



Begin the backward march...
How do 2020 protest relate to 1963?

MARCH ON WASHINGTON

1963



I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'

You could pause here and have the students complete a one question survey: Have the goals of the Civil Rights Movement been reached: all, some, or none. Survey Monkey or Google Drive has easy to use/create polling.

How Many Goals of MLK and the Civil Rights Movement Have Been Achieved?

	Total	Whites	Blacks
All/most	43%	45%	27%
Only some	51%	49%	67%
Almost none	3%	1%	5%

SOURCE: *CBS News*

You can compare the results of your student poll to the poll results displayed here. History is important... they are learning about the journey... the process. The positives, the negatives... getting them interested in modern times is often key to keeping them interested in the past!

Analyzing I Have a Dream...Pair/Group Discussion



With your partner or group, discuss each of the following:

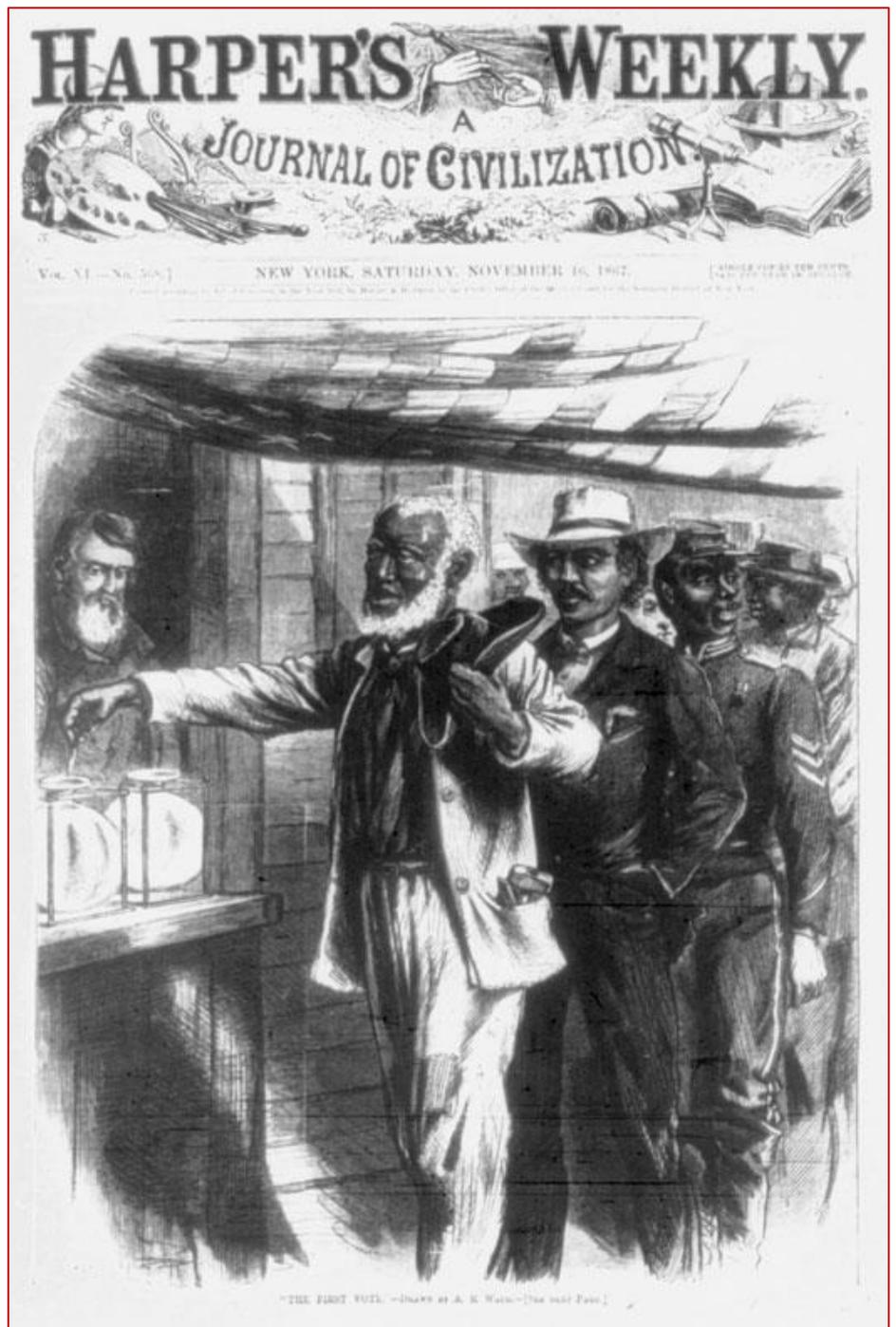
1. What was the historical situation? What is the historical context... why is the event, the March on Washington, historically significant? (Can you connect it to BLM?)
2. What was the author's point of view regarding the U.S. creed of "all men are created equal?"
3. What was the author's purpose?
4. What was the intended audience?
5. ... after identifying the *HIPP*... explain how or why.

Now we hopefully have students fully engaged... and can move further into historical analysis. Ask students if they can explain the historical situation by connecting to current events as well as connecting to their knowledge of the era in which the speech was given.

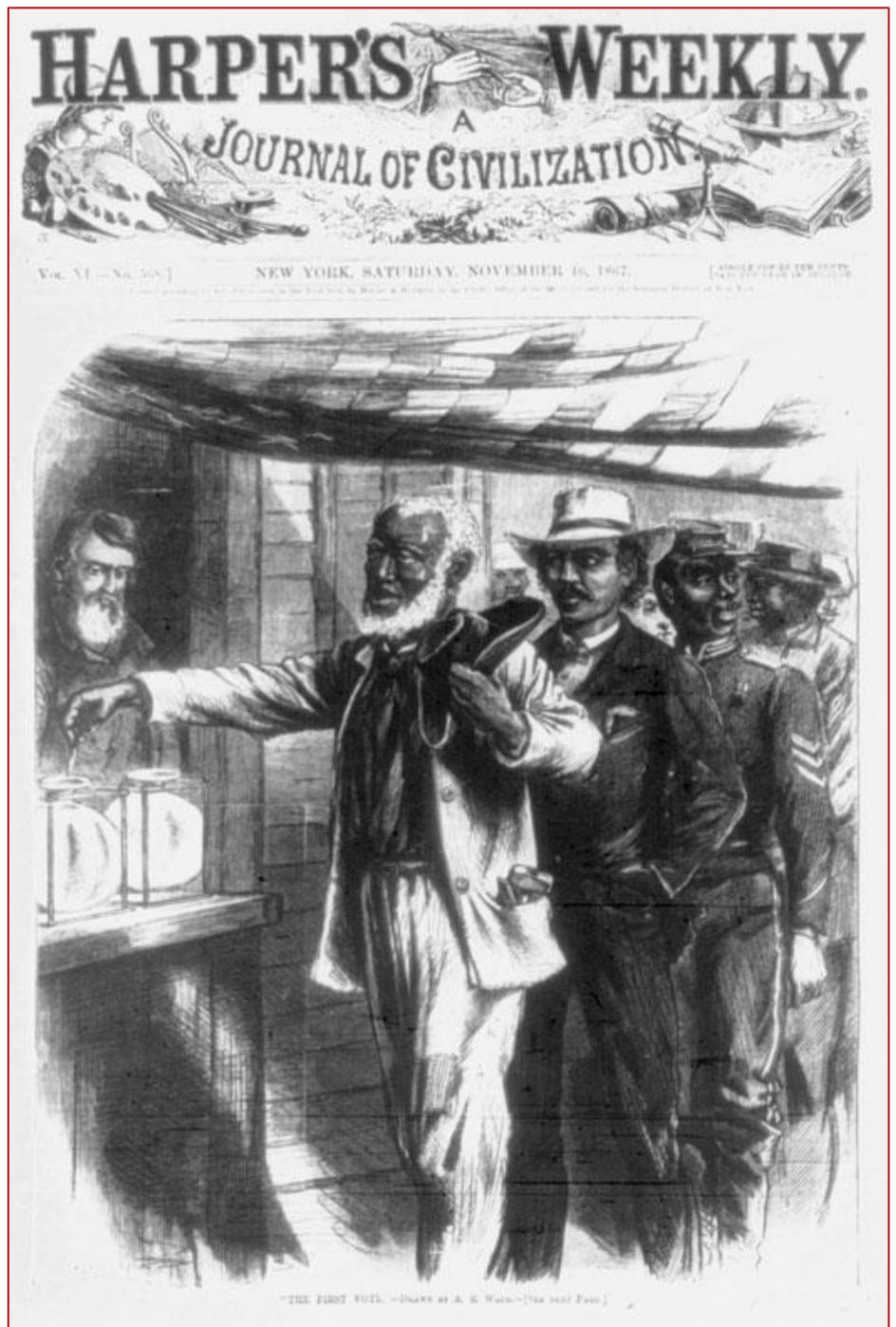
Continuing the Connections

HIPP the document... explain how or why

Source: *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1867, "The First Vote," drawn by A.R. Waud



If students have not studied Reconstruction Era yet, lead this discussion as a class. If they are familiar with it, have them discuss in pairs or groups. Remind students to pay attention to the sourcing information. When they see the year 1867 they should be able to connect to the Reconstruction Amendments, especially the 15th which gave Black men the right to vote. Students may stay focused on the Reconstruction Era and/or the Civil War. That is great! However, ask them if they can connect the image to modern times.



Continuing the Connections

Source: James Warren, newspaper editor, essay in the *Republican Centinel* during the debate in Massachusetts over ratifying the United States Constitution, 1788.

[By] the provision in the [constitutional] system for a representation of the people, which is the corner stone of a free government . . . , fifty thousand slaves, having neither liberty or property, will have a representative in that branch of the legislature [the House of Representatives]. . . . Should it be said, that not the slaves but their masters are to send a representative, the answer is plain: If the slaves have a right to be represented, they are on a footing with freemen. . . . What covenant [agreement] are the freemen of Massachusetts about to ratify? A covenant that will degrade them to the level of slaves. . . . Is this an equal, a safe, or a righteous plan of government?

HIPP the document... & explain how or why

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Again... if they haven't studied the Revolutionary Era... guide this discussion as a class. If they have, see if they can connect to the 3/5 Compromise as well as modern times.

This document is frequently misunderstood by students. The author's point of view is that slaves should NOT be counted. When he says, "if slaves have a right to be represented, they are on a footing with freemen... that will degrade them [freemen] to the level of slaves." Freemen are white men. Many students see this author as an abolitionist. He is not.

Continuing the Connections

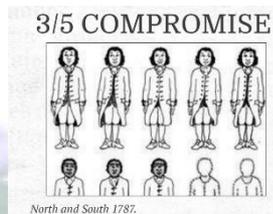


A ship “brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes” to Virginia in late August 1619 after capturing them from a slave ship bound for Spanish colonies. Painting of the arrival of the first Africans arriving in Virginia, Sydney King

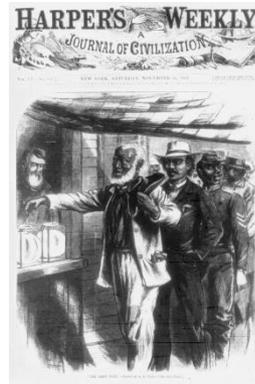
HIPP the image!

For enrichment, read more at <https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/african-americans-at-jamestown.htm>

To what extent did the Modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's maintain continuity and foster change in the lives of African Americans?



North and South 1787.



1619

1787

1867

★1963

2020

Closure can include essay skill practice. This could be extended to thesis writing, contextualization, and even an entire essay.

The star represents the central topic of the essay. The timeline represents events from the discussion that students can reference in evaluating continuity and change.

Modeling Good Writing

If you are introducing skills, or if skills still need to be reinforced before students write on their own. Model it! This can be done by using prepared examples or by class discussion. I do this a lot in the classroom. Students offer sample responses, and I record it on the board. Including two viewpoints is important... we want them to remember it's not necessarily a "right or wrong" argument... it is THEIR analysis.

Sample Thesis Statements:

Although the Modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's maintained continuity because many of its goals are still being sought in modern times, it fostered change to a greater extent because it created momentum leading to desegregation and voting rights for African Americans.

The Modern Civil Rights Movement fostered change, because it led to major changes such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, it maintained continuity to greater extent because African Americans are still fighting against bias and discrimination as can be seen in the modern day Black Lives Matter movement.

Modeling Good Writing

Sample Contextualizations:

Slavery began in the British North American colonies in 1619. The use of slaves escalated overtime, eventually becoming the primary source of labor on Southern plantations. Slaves were treated as property until the institution ended in 1865. This historical context relates to the topic of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, because the racism and discrimination that the movement aimed to end had its roots in slavery.

In 2020 the murder of George Floyd began a massive movement of protests against police brutality and other forms of discrimination. Many of the protests aim to end racial discrimination. This historical context relates to the Modern Civil Rights Movement, because many of the goals are similar such as fighting against police brutality.

Most students will contextualize the topic of an essay by focusing on the era in which it occurred. There is nothing wrong with that. But, remind students than contextualizing can come from pre or post era as well. Also remind them that it is important to clearly link their contextualization to the topic of the essay.

Modeling Good Writing

Sample Body Paragraphs for LEQ – defending argument with evidence:

The Modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's maintained continuity in the lives of African Americans because many of its goals are still being sought in modern times. The murder of George Floyd in 2020 illustrated one of many examples of police brutality in American history. Despite the accomplishments of the movement, events that were seen often in the past are still occurring. Modern movements such as BLM still fight for reduced prejudice.

The Modern Civil Rights Movement fostered change in the lives of African Americans to a great extent, because following events such as Martin Luther King's March on Washington, new legislation was passed ensuring protection of civil and voting rights for African Americans. Voter turnout increased as did the number of African Americans serving in public office. Voter suppression tactics like poll taxes and literacy tests were also removed, increasing the liberty for Blacks.

In an LEQ, students must defend their argument using a minimum of two pieces of outside evidence. They must explain how that evidence supports an argument.

Modeling Good Writing

Sample Document Usage for DBQ writing:

The Modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's fostered change. In the political cartoon, "The First Vote," Black men are seen proudly casting their votes in an election. This relates to the topic of African Americans, because it marks an important turning point in their civil rights. The historical situation of the cartoon was post Civil War Reconstruction which included the end of slavery and Black men receiving the right to vote. This right was enjoyed for only a short while. When Reconstruction ended many states created new policies to suppress the right to vote. This situation is relevant to the argument that the CRM fostered change, because the failure of Reconstruction progress regarding voting rights was conquered during the 1960's with new legislation. Therefore, the CRM fostered change by decreasing voter suppression among African Americans.

This sample is using the 3-step strategy. An overview of this strategy can be found here:
<http://nebula.wsimg.com/41a96d033e1a1ba80094d5090d90e0cb?AccessKeyId=E9AAE2A0AB5B10EA5F6&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

Lesson Strategy Summarized

- 1. Choose a modern day topic that students are interested in, and use that topic to start a conversation. Once students are engaged, explain how the topic is relevant not only to modern times but to U.S. history.**
- 2. Connect back using primary or secondary sources that are aligned with the current event. Use these sources to generate discussion not only on history but also the historical analysis skills needed for success in APUSH.**
- 3. Encourage small group discussions as well as writing practice.**
- 4. Model good writing.**

Additional Closure Strategy

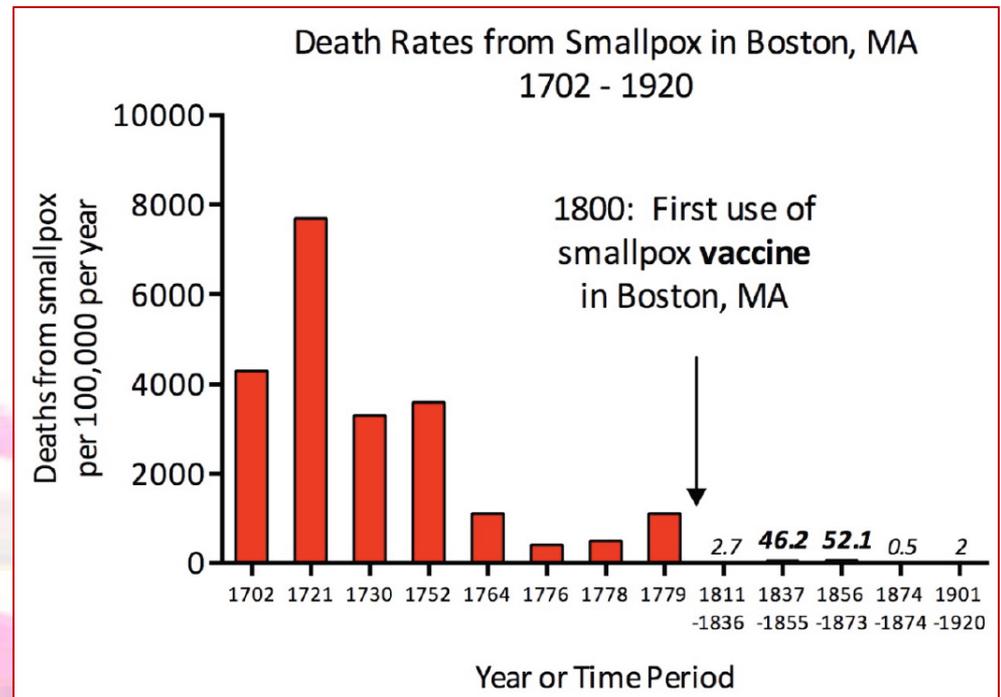
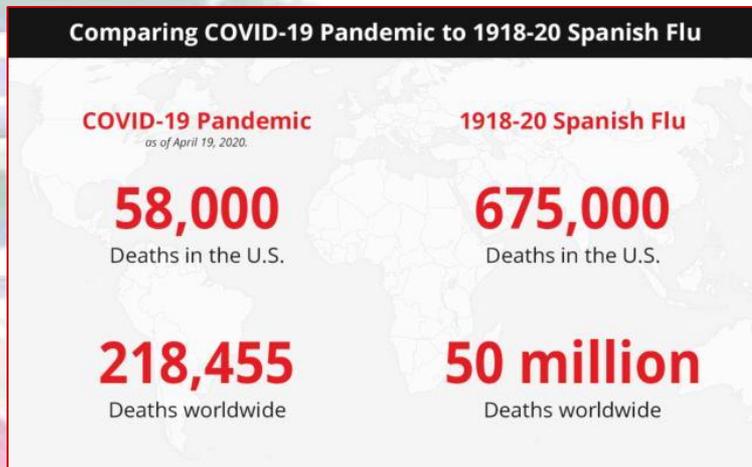
Have students address an SAQ in writing or verbally using something such as Flipgrid. You can also have them simply record their thoughts on the current event and its connections to earlier events in U.S. history.

Sample SAQ for Closure:

- a. Briefly explain ONE way the Constitution of the United States addressed the institution of slavery.
- b. Briefly explain ONE similarity between Reconstruction and the Modern Civil Rights Movement.
- c. Briefly explain ONE way the issue of racial discrimination continues to affect the United States.

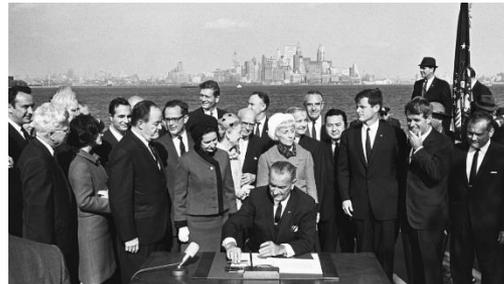
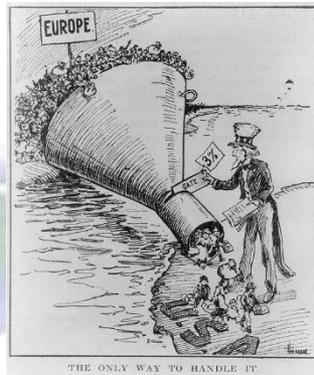
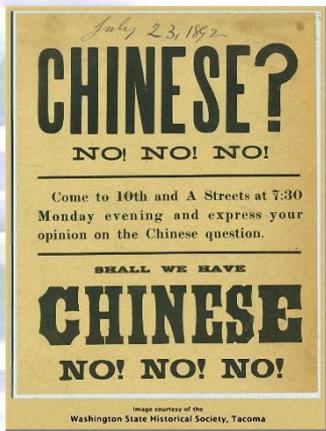
Other Possible Topics

Discuss Covid... then connect back to the Spanish Flu... then all the way back to smallpox.



Other Possible Topics

Discuss the border wall... then connect back to the 1965 Immigration Act... 1920's quotas... then all the way back to Chinese Exclusion. You could even go back to the Naturalization Act of 1790.



Food for Thought:

APUSH has a great deal of emphasis on the African American history thread. This thread is mentioned at least 33 times in the framework. The only other group mentioned more often is Native Americans/American Indians. (Of course Euro-centric/White history is mentioned the most.) The primary emphasis of Black History in APUSH is the institution of slavery and civil rights. I do not believe this is “enough.” Incorporating more of the amazing people, innovations, philosophies, etc. of Black Americans is powerful.

My African American students often become distant during lessons on slavery and civil rights. They tell me things like, “we hear this stuff our entire life,” or “I’m tired of my race being only a topic of oppression.” So... how can we incorporate more history?

[Black Innovators](#)

[Free Blacks in Antebellum Era](#)

[George Washington Carver](#)

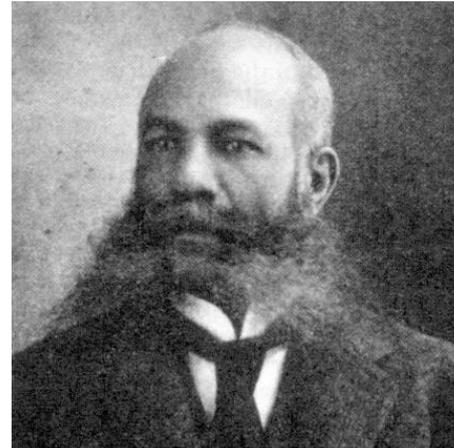
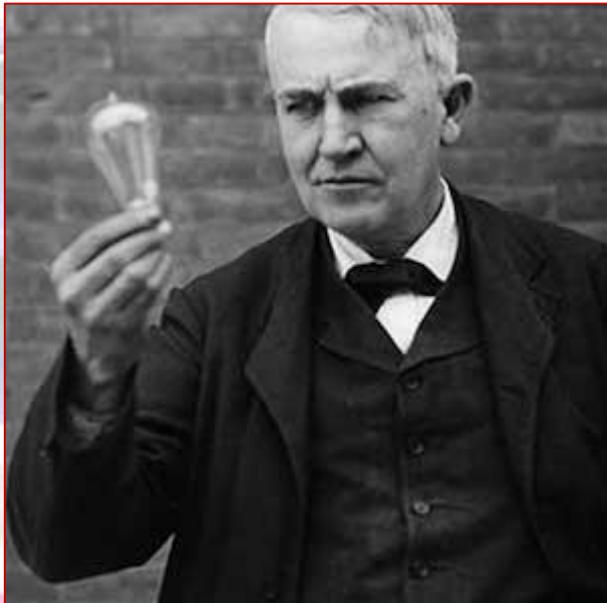
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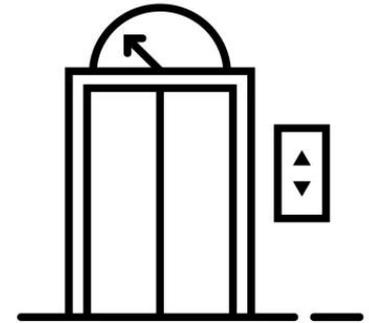
Example:

If discussing significant innovation such as electricity, you might discuss Thomas Edison and/or General Electric... why not also talk about Alexander Miles and the significance of elevators?

Black Innovators



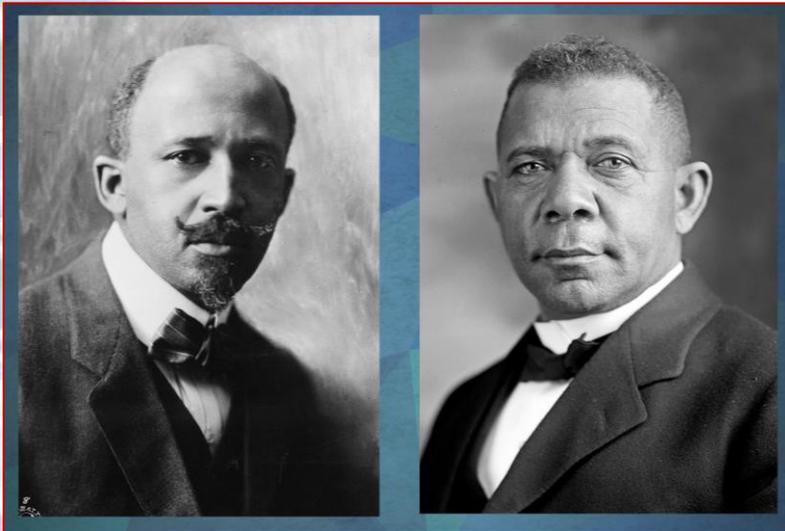
Public Domain & Infadel/Getty Images



Automatic Elevator Doors, Invented by Alexander Miles in 1887

Example:

If discussing W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, you might also discuss George Washington Carver. Broaden the discussion from civil rights at the turn of the century to innovations that contributed to environmentalism. [George Washington Carver](#)



Example:

If discussing the innovation of television and its impact on American culture... we often talk about how TV shows were very “white.” Why not add Robert Johnson to the discussion ([BET](#))?

