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Article

## **A Human Rights Education Analysis of the 'Know Your Rights Camp'**

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### **Abstract**

*This article analyzes the Know Your Rights Camp's "Speaking Out Against the Violence of Policing and Oppression: A Political Education Curriculum" from the campaign founded by Colin Kaepernick. The article evaluates the curriculum with a multifaceted perspective, specifically, the approach to inform learners about their foundational rights and lessons to politicize and empower them for social change through human rights education. A significant portion of this assessment is dedicated to examining the curriculum's inclusivity, ensuring the educational content is accessible. The analysis explores the curriculum's role in promoting learner agency and resistance, crucial for empowering students to navigate and challenge systemic inequities. This article contributes to the broader discourse on the importance of politically engaged educational practices, human rights awareness, and empowering Black and Brown learners in the fight against systemic oppression.*

**Keywords:** human rights education, Colin Kaepernick, curriculum, political education, Black liberation

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Colin Kaepernick's activism transcends his identity as a professional American football player; he has utilized his visibility to highlight systemic injustices faced by Black and Brown communities. Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the national anthem in 2016 to protest racial injustice in the United States was calculated, using his platform to voice the struggles of marginalized groups. This choice reflected a long-standing tradition among athletes of African ancestry who have utilized their prominence to fight for justice—echoing the legacies of Muhammad Ali, Jesse Owens, and Ernie "Rose" Robinson, among others. His protest, while in alignment with a rich history of athletic activism, was not without personal cost. His stand was detrimental to his professional career, leading to what many perceive as being blackballed by the National Football League (NFL) because he was never signed again by a team after 2017. Nonetheless, Kaepernick's commitment to social justice has remained steadfast.

Following his protest, Kaepernick continues to dedicate himself to furthering the cause for which he kneeled. Since 2016, he has founded and funded three organizations: The Know Your Rights Camp (KYRC), Ra Vision Media, and Kaepernick Publishing. Through these ventures, he aims to empower Black and Brown communities by focusing on storytelling, systems change, and political education, thus channeling his efforts into creating sustainable impacts within these communities (Kaepernick, 2019). His actions during the pre-game ceremonies of the NFL were a catalyst for a larger conversation about racial inequality and police brutality in the United States. Initially, Kaepernick's protest during the national anthem did not attract widespread attention. However, once a photograph capturing his silent demonstration went viral, Kaepernick articulated the intention behind his actions, confirming that it was a deliberate protest against racial oppression and police violence (Boykoff & Carrington, 2019).

The Know Your Rights Camp, founded by Colin Kaepernick, emerged as a direct response to the tragic killings of Black people by law enforcement. Initially, the camp's primary purpose was to educate Black and Brown youth ages 12-18 on survival tactics, specifically focusing on how to navigate the racially hostile and unjust environment of the United States. According to

Kaepernick (2019), the camp's focus has since evolved from merely surviving to empowering youth to thrive, stating that doing otherwise is injustice. It strives to support young individuals by providing them with essential resources, access, and knowledge to enhance their future. This focus is emphasized in the camp's 10-point system, as listed below. These principles, framed as affirmations, form the core of the camp's philosophy and approach to empowerment.

KYRC is pillared around 10 fundamental human rights, in homage to the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Platform and Program. According to Kaepernick, the principles represent the types of affirmations and protections that ought to be enjoyed by Black people globally:

- You have the right to be Free
  - You have the right to be Healthy
  - You have the right to be Brilliant
  - You have the right to be Safe
  - You have the right to be Loved
  - You have the right to be Courageous
  - You have the right to be Alive
  - You have the right to be Trusted
  - You have the right to be Educated
  - You have the right to Know Your Rights
- (Bocicault et al., 2019, para. 7).

The KYRC, backed by the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF) as its fiscal sponsor, is committed to educating Black and Brown communities about their paths to liberation and well-being. As highlighted on its website, a key part of the camp's mission is the preparation of the next generation of activists (Entertainment Industry Foundation, 2024). It seeks to equip them with the tools and knowledge necessary to challenge and overcome systemic oppression. Since the camp's inception it has had a profound impact, engaging over 1400 individuals and organizing eleven camps in seven different

cities to date. At the time of this writing, the most recent of these camps was held in Houston, Texas in December 2023.

The KYRC team has also developed an original curriculum: *Speaking Out Against the Violence of Policing and Oppression*. This curriculum serves as a supportive educational tool and is designed to prepare future generations of activists by teaching them the foundations of abolition activism, thereby continuing the camp's efforts of empowerment and education against systemic injustices.

In this article, I review and analyze the KYRC curriculum, *Speaking Out Against the Violence of Policing and Systemic Oppression*,<sup>1</sup> which details the approaches and methodologies for the camp, dedicated to advancing the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown communities through a focused approach on education, self-empowerment, and mobilization. In the sections that follow, this article explores the historical context of Black liberation and its intersection with human rights and offers a critical examination of the curriculum's content and structure.

### **Human Rights Education and Black Liberation**

The historical context of Black liberation is deeply intertwined with the struggle for human rights, marked by a persistent fight against the inferior status historically ascribed to people of African ancestry. This subjugation, rooted in a long history of racism and discrimination, has manifested in numerous dehumanizing practices. Chattel slavery, a cruel system where African people were treated as property, was just one of the many forms of oppression. This was accompanied by other egregious violations, such as sexual violence used as a tool of control and domination, lynching as a means of instilling fear and maintaining racial hierarchy, and economic exploitation. According to Hines, Hines, and Harrold (2019), formerly enslaved Africans did very little to trigger white violence, but whites were especially angered when Blacks began demanding political rights, which was met with violence.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, please refer to the Know Your Rights Camp's curriculum, *Speaking Out Against the Violence of Policing and Oppression*, available at <https://www.knowyourrightscamp.org/political-education-curriculum>.

These practices not only denied basic human rights but also enforced a state of second-class citizenship, leading to systemic disparities in healthcare, education, employment, and housing. The cumulative effect of these injustices has necessitated a continuous struggle for Black liberation as a pathway to achieving human rights.

Historical efforts toward Black liberation have been in response to white terror, hostility, structural racism, state violence, and exploitation. As Sonebeyatta and Brooks (1971) note, various ideologies and movements have sought to change the circumstances of Black people in America. These include Garveyism<sup>2</sup> in the 1910s onward, the Civil Rights Movement beginning in the 1950s, The Nation of Islam beginning in the 1930s, and The Black Panther Party's (beginning in the 1960s) initiatives for community control of inner cities (Sonebeyatta & Brooks, 1971). These movements, each in their own way, have addressed the legacy of enslavement and ongoing challenges to improving the quality of life for people of African ancestry. This struggle against oppression has been continuous, transcending the fight for civil rights to encompass a broader struggle for societal transformation and racial equality.

The relationship between efforts towards Black liberation and human rights is fundamental. Black leaders and advocates have long fought to re-frame the Black struggle as a fight for civil and human rights. Civil rights and Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael emphasized the need to reclaim Black history and identity from the oppressive narratives of white supremacy (Carmichael, 1966). Similarly, scholar and public intellectual C.L.R. James highlighted the global impact of racial prejudice, not just as an issue for African Americans but as a problem poisoning the entire U.S. civilization (James, 1967). As Grant and Gibson (2013) suggest, the language of human rights has been a powerful tool in challenging U.S. inequities and injustices

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<sup>2</sup> Garveyism, within the Afrocentric context, views the liberation struggle in terms of African nationalism versus European nationalism. Garveyism seeks the total liberation of Africans and all African peoples; unity, stability, a Pan African nationalist mental commonality; a sense of self, community; African nationhood, self-determination, self-reliance and a common destiny; the creation of Pan African nationalist solidarity and confraternity among all African peoples; political, economic and psychocultural sovereignty for all African peoples; and cooperatism (UCLA African Studies Center, n.d.).

domestically and internationally. Malcolm X's distinction between civil rights and human rights further stressed this point as he encouraged Black people to do two things: to see and include their humanity with the larger global population and to extend their grievances beyond the U.S. to leverage the government of the United Nations through the activation of a human rights framework (Malcolm X, 1965, as cited in National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox). This broader framing has continued to influence contemporary movements, with the legacy of groups like the Black Panther Party informing current grassroots efforts such as the KYRC (Bajaj, Katz, & Jones, 2021).

### **Methods & Researcher Positionality**

As an educator of African ancestry with extensive experience in Ethnic Studies and teaching in various educational settings from K-12 to college, my lived experience is a valuable tool in this analysis. While recognizing the importance of rigor and potential biases, my lived experience and proximity to the issues explored in the curriculum should be perceived as an asset rather than a detriment. In line with participatory action research<sup>3</sup> or collaborative community-based research,<sup>4</sup> my engagement with the subject matter provides an insider perspective that can reveal nuanced understandings often overlooked by detached research methods (Calderón et al., 2018; Maxwell, 2005). In analyzing the KYRC curriculum, my approach and the tools I employ are influenced by my understanding of the human rights education (HRE) framework and its application within the context of education. My methodology acknowledges the importance of examining human rights discourse critically, as suggested by Russell, Sirota, and Ahmed (2019).

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<sup>3</sup> Participatory action research (PAR) is a research approach that values experiential knowledge for addressing problems caused by harmful social systems.

<sup>4</sup> Community-based participatory research emphasizes collaborating with the community as co-researchers in the research process.

Understanding the perceived challenges and critiques of human rights education<sup>5</sup> is critical towards providing a lens through which the curriculum can be evaluated. HRE is touted as a means to promote human rights and address broader societal concerns (Andreopoulos & Claude, 1997), yet, as noted by Tibbitts and Katz (2018), while HRE can be a tool for emancipation, it is also susceptible to appropriation by authoritarian regimes seeking to entrench state power. This duality necessitates a nuanced analysis that considers how the curriculum navigates these potential pitfalls while striving to empower students.

My analysis of the KYRC curriculum is deeply rooted in the principles of human rights education, designed to empower individuals at the grass-roots level (Meintjes, 1997). This type of education is essential for developing a universal culture of human rights, as defined by the United Nations (1998), focusing on the dissemination of knowledge, the development of skills, and the shaping of attitudes necessary for:

- (a) reinforcing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) fostering the full development of the human personality and a sense of its dignity;
- (c) enhancing understanding, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among diverse groups;
- (d) enabling active participation in a free, democratic society underpinned by the rule of law;
- (e) contributing to the creation and preservation of peace;
- (f) advancing people-focused sustainable development and social justice. (UN, 1998).

I incorporate a comprehensive understanding of these human rights frameworks in my scholarly and personal methodology for examining the KYRC curriculum. I am mindful of potential biases and concentrate on assessing the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting human rights, addressing societal issues, and fostering holistic development among learners. This

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<sup>5</sup> Human rights education is a “deliberate, participatory practice aimed at empowering individuals, groups, and communities through fostering knowledge, skills, and attitudes consistent with internationally recognized principles” (definition from Amnesty International, as cited in Bajaj, 2011).



approach reflects a commitment to engaged, rigorous research that values insider knowledge as a critical analysis component.

My passion for creating transformational learning experiences, deeply rooted in racial justice, drives my approach to evaluating and assessing educational curricula like the KYRC. With nearly two decades of experience in teaching and developing curricula across various academic disciplines including Africana and Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, History, Psychology, and Sociology, I've humbly collaborated and supported learners of the Black and Brown community. This experience gained across high schools, colleges, universities, and carceral spaces in the Bay Area equips me with a multifaceted perspective essential for a thorough and informed assessment of such curricula.

### **The Know Your Rights Camp**

Leveraging my multifaceted perspective, I assess the curriculum, focusing on several key aspects. First, I examine how the curriculum actively engages learners, particularly in fostering interactive and meaningful learning experiences. A critical part of this evaluation is understanding how the curriculum specifically addresses the learning needs of Black and Brown learners, ensuring it is inclusive and relevant to their social-cultural experiences. Additionally, I explore how the curriculum educates learners about their basic human rights, which is fundamental in HRE. Another important aspect of my assessment is determining how the curriculum promotes learner agency and resistance, enabling students to recognize and assert their identities, abilities, and voices. Finally, I assess the practices the curriculum introduces for learners to actively participate in activism while nurturing their wellness and protecting their humanity. These evaluation strategies aim to identify how the curriculum imparts knowledge and equips learners with practical skills, individually or collectively.

The KYRC Curriculum presents a transformative educational experience, spanning five days, each day with multiple fifty-minute daily activities; informed by the theoretical frameworks of human rights education and

critical race theory<sup>6</sup> this curriculum explores important socio-political themes such as identity and intersectionality, Black liberation, human rights, abolitionist perspectives, solidarity, community building, and restorative justice and healing. Black liberation refers to the socio-political movements and values aiming to secure freedom and racial equality for people of African ancestry, addressing systemic racism and its effects. Abolitionist perspectives advocate for the eradication of systems of oppression, such as slavery or the prison-industrial complex, identifying fundamental injustices, and advocating for radical change (Stovall, 2018). According to Delany (1853), Carmichael (1966), and Garvey (2009), it is imperative for people of African ancestry to employ political beliefs and practices to eradicate systemic oppression and engage in efforts to develop autonomous Black communities in the U.S., elsewhere in the African diaspora, or on the continent of Africa. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw,<sup>7</sup> examines how various social and cultural categories, like race, gender, and class, interact on multiple levels to manifest in complex systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Meintjes (1997) suggested that human rights education is empowerment. Asante (2003) communicated the importance of African-centered thought while addressing the historical, social, and political experience of people of African ancestry, and Sonebeyatta and Brooks (1971) challenged people of African ancestry to leverage their collective power to fight oppression and their liberation; each center humanity and emphasis activism. These approaches, in addition to intersectionality, provide a nuanced lens to examine the curriculum while being thoughtful about the learners' experience.

The KYRC curriculum is structured around five key learning objectives:

1. Fostering critical reflection on personal identity and its influence on perceptions of oppression and racism.

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<sup>6</sup> The body of work by Critical Race Theory scholars Derrick Bell (1992), Richard Delgado (1999), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (2011) addresses the liberal notion of color blindness and argues that ignoring racial difference maintains and perpetuates the status quo with all its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about intersectionality please refer to this resource, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>

2. Deconstructing and reevaluating historical narratives to comprehensively understand race and racialization.
3. Envisioning and strategizing towards a prison-free society where abolition and justice prevail.
4. Identifying and enhancing individual roles in community accountability and organizing effective community campaigns.
5. Collaborating to facilitate restoration, repair, and healing within community spaces. (Osterndorf et al., 2021 p. 7)

This curriculum specifically seeks to educate learners from Black and Brown communities, deepening their understanding of human rights and empowering them toward liberation. In the following section, a description and analysis of the daily curriculum is provided.

### **Day 1: Identity and Intersectionality**

The first day of the KYRC curriculum explores the complexities of identity and intersectionality—race, gender, sexuality, class, and more. The activities are designed to deepen learners' understanding of key concepts like power, oppression, privilege, and various domains of power, including structural, hegemonic, and interpersonal. Through group discussions, learners explore and provide examples of these concepts, gaining insight into how individual experiences perpetuate power structures. A significant focus is placed on recognizing the influence of language in shaping identities. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of respectful communication, particularly in linguistic violence<sup>8</sup> (Gay, 1998), thereby setting the groundwork for a deeper understanding of identity and intersectionality.

Moreover, the curriculum equips learners with the necessary tools and vocabulary to express their identities and experiences related to oppression. During the second learner activity, participants engage with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which invites them to reflect on their own

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<sup>8</sup> Linguistic violence refers to the use of language to harm, degrade, or devalue an individual or group. This can encompass a range of behaviors from slurs, insults, and hate speech to more subtle forms of language that perpetuate discrimination and social inequities. It is a concept that recognizes the power of words not just as tools of communication, but as instruments that can cause real psychological and social harm, contributing to the perpetuation of systemic oppression (Gay, 1998)

identities and how various forms of power intersect to influence the significance of those identities. In the subsequent third activity, the discussion evolves to incorporate Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) Matrix of Domination<sup>9</sup> (shown below), guiding learners to examine their identities further and lived experiences against the backdrop of a group's potential for experiencing domination, resistance, and privilege. It motivates students to identify and challenge systemic obstacles and empowers them to actively advocate for social change. Throughout the initial day, the curriculum offers practical lessons and resources that help develop a deep awareness of personal and social identities, intersectionality, and systemic oppression.


**The Matrix of Domination**  


Table 1.1 The four domains of the matrix of domination	
<b>Structural domain</b> Organizes oppression: laws and policies.	<b>Disciplinary domain</b> Administers and manages oppression. Implements and enforces laws and policies.
<b>Hegemonic domain</b> Circulates oppressive ideas: culture and media.	<b>Interpersonal domain</b> Individual experiences of oppression.

Chart based on concepts introduced by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

Figure 1:  
*“The Matrix of Domination” from the Know Your Rights Camp Curriculum (p. 16)*

## Day 2: Black Liberation and Human Rights Framework

The second day, the curriculum focuses on Black Liberation and the Human Rights Framework. Learners engage in reflective discussions about U.S. history, examining the narratives often marginalized in mainstream education. This portion of the curriculum is grounded in the teachings of influential figures like Paulo Freire,<sup>10</sup> Septima Poinsette Clark,<sup>11</sup> and James

<sup>9</sup> For more information about the Matrix of Oppression, please view the link: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/252.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Paulo Freire was a transformative Brazilian educator and philosopher whose innovative educational theories have significantly impacted the pedagogy of developing and developed countries. His influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is considered foundational in the field of critical pedagogy, emphasizing the role of education in fostering social justice and empowering the marginalized.

<sup>11</sup> Septima Clark was an educator and civil rights activist who championed racial equality through education and empowerment. Her work with the Citizenship School program helped many African

Baldwin.<sup>12</sup> It highlights the critical role of Black liberation movements in shaping human rights discourse, emphasizing that education has the dual potential to either uphold the status quo or to act as a powerful tool for liberation. An essay by Ronald Takaki (1993) serves as a basis for discussion, prompting learners to critique the 'master narrative' of the United States, which is rooted in Eurocentrism and whiteness. The day's activities include preparing a land acknowledgment, which recognizes the history of colonialism and stresses the importance of Indigenous humanity and rights. This day aims to broaden learners' understanding of history and its impact on present human rights issues.

### **Day 3: Abolitionist Imaginings**

The third day, centered around 'abolitionist imaginings,' focuses on understanding the institutions of policing and the embedded history of anti-Black racism and racial capitalism, a term coined by Cedric Robinson (1983) and elaborated upon by scholars such as Melamed (2015) and Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) that asserts that "capitalism and racism ... did not break with the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of racial capitalism dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism and genocide" (Kelley, 2017, para. 5). Learners read and discuss articles detailing the evolution of policing and the private, profit-seeking prison system. These discussions, in peer or small groups, help to contextualize these systems within broader societal frameworks. The curriculum encourages learners to envision a society free from oppressive systems, challenging them to think critically about the difference between reforming and abolishing these systems.

The curriculum is designed to stimulate critical thinking and personal reflection. An example of this is when learners are tasked with writing letters

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Americans gain the literacy necessary for voting at a time when discriminatory literacy tests prevented them from registering to vote.

<sup>12</sup> James Baldwin was a profound American writer and social critic who explored the intricacies of racial, sexual, and class distinctions in Western societies, particularly mid-20th-century North America. His works are celebrated for dissecting the complexities of identity and social pressures, and his notable contributions to literature include essays, novels, and plays that highlight critical themes of humanity and justice.

to their ancestors or future family members, exploring their perceptions of joy and resistance. This exercise links personal history and aspirations to the broader context of social justice and abolitionist movements. Such activities also embody what scholar Robin D.G. Kelley terms “freedom dreaming” beyond current oppressive systems (Kelley, 2003).

#### **Day 4: Solidarity and Community Building**

Day four emphasizes solidarity and community building. The curriculum encourages learners to dissect the meanings of solidarity and community, and to understand the importance of multiracial spaces in the movement for Black liberation. Discussions focus on the roles of various social groups, including white and non-Black people, in supporting this movement.

Activities for the day include recognizing various participatory roles in activism—actor, ally, accomplice, and co-conspirator—and understanding how to apply these roles effectively in real-world situations. Following an exercise where learners formulate and exchange their interpretations of these terms, they are guided to compare their definitions with those from Jonathan Osler (n.d.) While navigating through the site, students are encouraged to reflect on the provided definitions and to reflect the following:

- What are your thoughts on these definitions?
- Do these definitions prompt you to re-evaluate your actions or those around you that have been categorized as 'activism'? (Osterndorf et al, 2021 p. 32)

This day aims to foster a sense of collective responsibility and equip learners with the tools needed for effective community building and activism.

#### **Day 5: Restorative Justice and Healing Justice**

The final day is dedicated to restorative justice and healing justice. The curriculum guides learners to envision their ideal community, prompting them to consider its needs and how to address them. A significant portion of the day is devoted to discussing the concept of crime as a social construct and the various levels at which harm occurs. Learners explore restorative

justice and transformative justice, examining how these approaches can be applied to repair and heal communities. The curriculum explores the following quote of healing justice as presented by Cara Page and the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective.

Healing justice...identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence, and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts and minds. (as cited in Hemphill, 2017, para. 5)

This aspect of healing justice involves developing practitioners skilled in navigating trauma, identifying institutions that undermine healing, and valuing emotional labor as central to sustainability and restoration of Black and Brown communities. The curriculum also introduces the concept of reparations, encouraging learners to think critically about accountability, healing, and the steps necessary to repair harm within their communities.

Each day of the curriculum is structured to build upon the previous one, culminating in some working understanding of social justice issues, community empowerment, and the importance of active participation in societal change. *The Know Your Rights* curriculum is a tool for educators to engage Black and Brown learners in lessons and activities to develop their political consciousness and empower them to advocate against systems of oppression. Over five days, educators guide Black and Brown learners in a collective learning experience, exploring themes of Identity and Intersectionality, Black Liberation Through History and the Human Right Framework, Abolitionist Imaginings, Solidarity and Community Building, and Restorative Justice and Healing Justice. The curriculum seeks to prepare Black and Brown learners with the information and tools to engage in social change.

### **BECOMING A DEFENDER**

*"Without healing there is no justice."* (Dignity and Power Now, 2019)

As a class, host your own community care, wellness, and healing event to celebrate your campaign work. This event might include some or all of the following activities, based on learners' strengths and interests:

- Poetry reading, writing, and performance.
- Creation of abolitionist posters.
- Postcard writing to provide support to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people.
- Restorative yoga.
- Sharing of cultural and personal artifacts.
- Campaign sharing and organizing tables.

Research and contact healers or counselors who can attend the event to provide emotional support. Ensure that the event also includes materials and kits to sustain participants and attendees, including water, snacks, and music.

*Figure 2:  
"Becoming a Defender" from  
the Know Your Rights Camp  
Curriculum (p. 47)*

## **A Human Rights Education Analysis**

The KYRC curriculum utilizes a student-centered approach designed to align with the interests and needs of its learners. The approach of multimodalities is innovative, for it considers the diverse learning preferences and requirements of the learners. A key feature of this curriculum is its intentional inclusion of texts and media authored by individuals from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This choice not only enhances the curriculum with various perspectives but also ensures that the content is more relatable and reflective of the diverse experiences of the learners. Fostering an inclusive and representative educational environment, the emphasis on learner needs and diverse authorship are central to the curriculum's cultural responsiveness and effort to empower learners.

As a fundamental practice of HRE, the KYRC curriculum aims to redefine the dynamics between students and teachers. The curriculum initiates this shift through a letter addressed to teachers and educators in its early pages, inviting them to create and maintain a safe and trusting learning environment to explore human rights and Black liberation. This approach



aligns with the care components outlined in Hantzopoulos' (2016) work, *Restoring Dignity in Public Schools: Human Rights Education in Action*. Hantzopoulos identifies core aspects of care, including perceiving teachers as equals, family, and friends, and fostering a culture of critical care. This concept of care is crucial as it contributes to forming strong student–teacher relationships, which are instrumental in shaping students' educational experiences. The curriculum's emphasis on these relationships reflects an understanding that effective HRE extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it requires a supportive, respectful, and empowering environment where the roles of teachers and students are reimagined and collaborative.

The KYRC curriculum extends its exploration of human rights beyond the initial letter to teachers and educators. A notable aspect of the curriculum is its introduction of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) through a critical analysis activity. This exercise allows learners to engage in a comparative analysis between the UDHR and the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program,<sup>13</sup> thereby deepening their understanding of human rights.

Additionally, the curriculum enriches this exploration by including supplemental articles about human rights efforts. However, it is noteworthy that the curriculum does not explicitly mention human rights education as a field or provide a definition for it. This omission presents an interesting point of reflection. Exploring HRE as a learning activity could foster a more transformative learning environment, reimagining the teacher-student relationship. As Hantzopoulos (2016) articulates,

To resolve this tension, critical educators insist that the nature of the relationship must transform through critical dialogue so that power—once located solely in the teacher's hands—can shift to the students, reversing roles so that teachers can validate and affirm the knowledge of students. (p. 50)

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<sup>13</sup> The full 10-point program can be accessed here: [https://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions\\_platform.html](https://www.pbs.org/hueypnewton/actions/actions_platform.html)

Such an approach could have further supported a shared learning process, encouraging teachers and learners to envision and co-create an educational setting that is more collaborative, empowering, and attuned to human rights principles.

Exploring HRE within the KYRC curriculum offers an invaluable opportunity to elevate the program's educational and liberatory effort, especially in critically examining the U.S. educational system's historical failings<sup>14</sup> towards Black and Brown communities. This critique is not intended to diminish the curriculum's value but rather to acknowledge the specific experiences of BIPOC learners and how the educational system has often failed them. The curriculum addresses historical atrocities in a manner that seems to act as a catalyst to engage learners in critical questioning, empowering them for liberatory efforts against oppressive institutions. However, its notable omission of a critical examination of the U.S. educational system itself, which has frequently neglected and harmed students from Black and Brown communities, is a missed opportunity. This oversight is particularly significant given the U.S. educational system's parallels with other oppressive institutions explored in the curriculum, such as police and carceral spaces, often perceived as part of the prison nexus<sup>15</sup> (Stovall, 2018). This aligns with Article 26 of the UDHR, which highlights as establishing "not only a right to an education for all children but an education directed towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (as cited in Bajaj, 2018). Integrating HRE

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<sup>14</sup> According to The National Center for Education Statistics (2019), there has been a general increase in high school completion rates in the U.S. From 2000 to 2016, the high school status completion rate for Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds increased from 64 to 89 percent, while the Black and white status completion rates increased from 84 to 92 percent and 92 to 94 percent. Although there is an increase in completion rates, reading and math scores for both Black and Brown students remain lower than white students. Some attribute this reality to the achievement gap. Weir (2016) outlines the disparities in schools, highlighting the inequities in standardized testing, discipline, and opportunities to participate in programs for gifted students. Please refer to the following resources for more information, <https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion#CA> and <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019038.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> In response to the limitations of the student to prison pipeline metaphor, which conceptualizes the relationship between schools and prisons as a unidirectional pathway, a small group of scholars has begun to refer instead to a school-prison nexus: a complex web of policies, ideas and institutional practices that converge to blur the boundaries between education and incarceration (Annamma, 2018; Meiners, 2007; Sojoyner, 2016).

to critique and improve understanding of the educational system could have significantly improved the curriculum and learning experience of the learners, furthering the KYRC's efforts towards human rights and liberation.

The KYRC curriculum can be examined through the lens of the three emerging HRE models outlined by Tibbitts (2002; 2017) in her seminal work *Emerging Models of Human Rights Education*. Firstly, the Values and Awareness Model, which aims to impart knowledge of human rights to learners, is somewhat reflected in the curriculum's focus on enlightening Black and Brown communities about their fundamental human rights. However, this model primarily serves as a foundational layer in the curriculum, as it goes beyond mere awareness—engaging learners in applying ideas and concepts and participating in action.

More prominently, the Accountability Model, intended to influence learners' knowledge, attitudes, and actions for respecting and promoting human rights in their professional roles, can be seen within the curriculum's emphasis on self-empowerment and mobilization. This model's influence is evident in how the curriculum encourages learners to become proactive advocates for human rights within their communities.

Of all the models proposed by Tibbitts (2017), the KYRC Curriculum most closely aligns with the Transformation Model. This model, centered on engaging learners in transformative and emancipatory learning through critical pedagogy, is at the heart of Kaepernick's initiative. The curriculum educates and empowers learners to explore human rights issues critically and engage in socio-political learning activities aimed at social and political change. The curriculum empowers learners to participate actively in social change by adopting the role of defenders. It encourages learners to engage in various activities that foster self-empowerment and advocacy for human rights. For instance, students are encouraged to learn about the First Nations' land on which they reside and to create a land acknowledgment for their class, school, or community. They are also prompted to write their narratives and to critically examine the history texts used in their schools by identifying and challenging any inaccuracies, myths, or stereotypes, and reporting these to school administrators. Furthermore, students are invited to reflect on their

school or community and to develop their own Five Point Program, grounded in human rights and core values. Furthermore, by centering the identity and role of the learner, these pedagogical principles foster an environment where students can critically analyze their realities, thereby catalyzing transformative change in their communities and beyond. This alignment emphasizes the curriculum's commitment to informing and empowering its learners to be agents of change in their pursuit of human rights and social justice.

The KYRC curriculum is positioned at the intersection of the fields of human rights education and social justice education. This positioning is evident through its alignment with the four tenets of liberatory education (Bajaj, 2018), that include:

- Relevant curriculum and pedagogy
- Deep analysis of social inequalities
- Fostering critical consciousness
- Cultivating transformative agency

Notably, the curriculum adopts learning activities prioritizing social justice and liberation, positioning learners as defenders of human rights. Throughout its content, there is a recurrent use of the language of human rights and liberation. However, the nuanced differences in this language may be of secondary importance compared to the overarching goal of engaging learners in critical preparation for transformation and agency.

While thoughtfully incorporating Black liberation and human rights elements, the KYRC curriculum overlooks a crucial opportunity in its pedagogical approach. Notably, it references the influential efforts of Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik Shabazz) at the United Nations in 1964, where he endeavored to elevate the civil rights struggle to a global human rights issue. Despite mentioning Malcolm X's contributions and highlighting the Black Panther Party's socio-political endeavors, the curriculum stops short of fully engaging learners in defining liberation. Such a definition, particularly in the context of civil rights and human rights, is often shrouded in ambiguity. The curriculum includes liberatory activities such as exploring identity, creating a land acknowledgment, and learning about the UDHR and important vocabulary. However, by not providing learners with the opportunity to construct their

definition of liberation, potentially through a design thinking activity, it misses a chance to deepen their understanding and empowerment. This oversight perhaps limits the curriculum's effectiveness in enabling learners to critically engage with and internalize the concept of liberation, a key element in understanding the historical and ongoing struggles for human rights and racial justice.

For many, the curriculum is perceived as empowering, but Meintjes (1997) suggests that a more structured approach is necessary to accurately assess empowerment. According to Meintjes, an evaluation tool is essential to determine a learner's ability to recognize human rights issues, express awareness or understanding of their role in protecting human rights, and critically evaluate to assess the empowerment of a learner. This implies that measuring how effectively the program equips learners with these skills is crucial for a curriculum like that of the KYRC.

Meintjes (1997) further discusses HRE as a form of empowerment, emphasizing that real empowerment can only occur if educators' and learners' knowledge and experience are integrated. This integration is necessary for the KYRC curriculum to ensure that it is both informative and transformative. Empowerment, as defined by Meintjes, is a process through which people or communities increase their control or mastery over their lives and the decisions that affect them. This definition underscores the importance of the curriculum in empowering learners to take charge of their lives and to make informed decisions about social issues.

Moreover, Meintjes (1997) states that human rights education as empowerment requires enabling each target group to acquire the knowledge and critical awareness needed to understand and question oppressive patterns of social, political, and economic organizations. This approach is necessary for the KYRC curriculum, as it aims to educate learners about systemic injustices while equipping them with the tools to challenge and change these systems.

Recognizing the value of Meintjes' perspective on empowerment and assessment within human rights education, it is important to note that while benefiting from such insights, the KYRC curriculum is not strictly beholden

to this approach. It is also important to acknowledge that the curriculum incorporates numerous empowering practices even without formal assessment methods. A recommendation for the camp might be to look at human rights-based approaches to assessment as scholars in the field have elaborated (Hantzopoulos et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the curriculum's authors did not explicitly state that an HRE approach informed the design and implementation of the curriculum. While the curriculum aligns with many principles of human rights education, its development may have been guided by a broader spectrum of educational philosophies and pedagogical strategies.

While the KYRC curriculum is a valuable educational resource, its ambitious scope within a limited timeframe raises concerns about its practicality and inclusiveness. Spanning a dense array of topics over five days, the curriculum overlooks its learners' diverse learning needs and processing speeds. For instance, the curriculum assigns a reading of Ronald Takaki's "A Different Mirror," a substantial essay of twenty pages, without considering the feasibility of this task within the given time. This oversight suggests the curriculum needs to accommodate a broader spectrum of learners, particularly those who may require more time to absorb and reflect on new information. A potential solution to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness and inclusiveness would be to extend its duration. Transforming the five-day program into a five- to ten-week course at the high school and/or community college level would allow for a more scaffolded approach to learning. Such an expansion would provide ample time for learners to thoroughly engage with the material, process new concepts, and foster a sense of community. This adjustment would accommodate a broader range of learning styles and ensure a deeper and more meaningful educational experience for all participants.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Throughout the textual analysis of the KYRC curriculum, coupled with critical reflections on HRE, resistance, and theoretical approaches employed to support students and learners with critical thinking and social transformation, I have been inundated with thoughts and content about the

safety of students and learners beyond the classroom as they advocate for justice. The stakes are exceedingly high, so students and learners must be educated about the realities of activism and its potential consequences. While it can be argued that there are consequences for not fighting for justice—a reality highlighted by the countless individuals whose lives have been taken prematurely<sup>16</sup>—it is equally important for educators to provide learners with practices to engage in social change efforts, as well as tools to protect themselves.

The Know Your Rights Camp curriculum meets the goal of furthering the understanding of human rights and liberation for Black and Brown learners and a broader audience. This curriculum is commendable for its humanizing approach towards historically marginalized communities. It enables learners to deeply explore the historical, social, and political experiences of Black and Brown communities, aligning with the core tenets of Black Studies and Ethnic Studies. By placing the experiences and voices of the BIPOC community at the forefront and acknowledging numerous historical atrocities, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of life and social justice—encompassing both physical and psychological safety for these communities.

Moreover, the curriculum prepares learners to become defenders against oppression, equipping them with the essential tools and perspectives needed for active advocacy in social change. Practices of dreaming and reimagining reinforce this advocacy, which is necessary for nurturing learners into agents of social change. The curriculum also promotes emotional intelligence and wellness, creating an inclusive and safe learning environment facilitated by teachers. Whether used as a stand-alone tool or integrated into other curricula focused on social justice activism and healing, the Know Your Rights Camp curriculum is a valuable and transformative educational resource that stands out for its depth, inclusivity, and potential for meaningful empowerment.

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<sup>16</sup> There have been several innocent Black, Brown, Queer, and trans people unjustly murdered by law enforcement; this practice of violence negated the humanity of many—Freddie Gray, Tony McDade, and Mario Gonzalez, to mention a few.

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