OPTION A: CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE USA 1946-1968

(MARTIN LUTHER KING)

"CONTENT FOCUS"  "Key features and issues"  Page 90

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The list of key features and issues are relevant to civil rights.

There is no specific mention of religion in the prescription for study of civil rights throughout the draft. The Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens’ Council are named under “Struggle for civil rights”.

1. Recommendation: Martin Luther King’s title of “Reverend” should precede his name in the heading.
   It is likely that on every occasion Mary MacKillop’s name is written it would have been preceded by Sister, now Saint.
   Professor M A Glendon of Harvard, a Catholic has advocated for “Rev.” for M L King.
   Professor Glendon spoke about this on ABC radio when she visited Australia as a guest of Caritas several years ago.

2. Recommendation: Religion was essential in the struggle for civil rights in the United States
   The role of the Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement is absolutely central. These two point should be highlighted by listing them for points for investigation under “Key features and issues”.

Rev Professor James H, Cone of Union Theological Seminary strongly supports “the view that religion was essential in the struggle for civil rights in the United States. Page 1
The black freedom movement began in a church, and Martin Luther King, Jr. was selected as a leader.
Without the faith of the black church, there is no way that the civil rights movement could have been so successful. Malcolm X, of course, challenged King, even used the Muslim religion, and it made him converge toward Martin King. Both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X are essential for understanding the meaning of the black freedom movement in the United States.” (Letter dated 9 September 2010)

Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar, First Amendment Center, author of books on teaching history including religious history has said: “the role of the Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement is absolutely central and should be highlighted.” (Letter to Alex Mills 2011)

From “29 influences on American History”. Published by ASCD. USA

Influence 16 “To understand modern politics it is necessary to understand the centrality of religion in African-American culture.”

Influence 23 “The place of religion in the civil rights crusade surrounding Martin Luther King, Jr and especially the roles of American Protestant, Jewish and Catholic clergy in it.”

[National History Curriculum: a submission Part 6...p3]

3. Recommendation: There is a need for BOSTES to give reasons why it supports the view that “religion was essential to the struggle for civil rights in the United States” and “the role of the Black Churches was absolutely central” so that it may encourage the Draft Syllabus reviewers to assess the best way that a direction for investigation of this can be prepared for students. If BOSTES is of the view that the academics who are quoted are in error that “religion” was not “essential” or the “Black Churches” were not “absolutely central” “to the struggle for civil rights in the United States” then their historic reasons for this view should be made available to syllabus writers, stake holders including churches, and the general public.

There is concern that BOSTES will not support the view that “religion was essential to the struggle for civil rights in the United States” and “the role of the Black Churches was absolutely central” by approving, or insisting that it is a direction for investigation. (Draft Syllabus p 90)

If BOSTES decides not to support those two points about religion in the Syllabus then is it reasonable to expect that a letter be prepared and sent to Professor James Cone and Charles Haynes explaining why.

The letter could be made available to those responsible for the Melbourne Declaration on Education, teachers, parents, Aboriginal organisations, universities, church organisations and Rotary. The Minister for Education and other people who are likely, or have made claims, that the NSW syllabuses are world standard need to be informed for this is misleading the Australian people as well as undermining respect for Christian churches.
Since 2010 I have been quoting the letters of Professor Cone and Charles Haynes to curriculum decision writers specifically regarding religion and the Black Churches. For years before that historic material has been presented to curriculum writers which highlight what these men have said. Decision makers have not responded. The word “religion” has not been stated in the Civil Rights Option. (Syllabus page 90)

What more effective action could be taken to gain a clear statement based on historic information about why those responsible for the curriculum and syllabuses and also civics and citizenship education do not approve of recognising how essential religion was in the civil rights movement?

4. Recommentation: “religious” should be added to “contribution of key individuals to social and political change” under “Key features and issues”.

Source for investigating point number 3 included pages that were included in documents on the Civil Rights Movement documents that should have arrived at BOSTES on Sept 2, 2016
* “Religion was essential in the struggle for civil rights in the United States”
* “3. Failure to acknowledge the role of Christians in the US Civil Rights Movement”
[“religious people” should have been used rather than “Christians”].
Note Muslim, Jews, and others have contributed to the Civil Rights Movement.
* FOR Fellowship of Reconciliation paper of Congressman John Lewis. If memory serves me correctly, he was a Christian minister and may have visited Little Rock regarding high school issues.

Source for point number 4
* “From Hollow to Whole”:
Gandhi p3;
Birmingham Gaol, Young King p4,
Children’s Crusade Pledge to walk in love with God p6
Birmingham and Washington documents in Discovering Democracy p6 T

Textbook ignore churches in the struggle p7
Parents right to expect religion is taught.p9-10
Texts impression only acceptable religious belief is humanism. Prof Tim Smith & Texts p10
29 religious influences on American History p11;

Source for point number 4
National History Curriculum: a submission Part 6
From page 4:”An outline of Religious Influences in aspects of the US Civil Rights Movement”.
This is followed by a more detailed account. 

Page 3
"CONTENT"
"Students investigate"
"Overview"

"*The state of affairs at the turn of the 20th century"

Plessy vs Ferguson case: A Presbyterian [Christian] lawyer had challenged that concept of legal segregation. 1896 (National History Curriculum...Part 6 American Civil R M [NHC Part 6]p 9) The Plessy vs Ferguson decision "encouraged many governments to African Americans and to deny them social and economic opportunities" (Keane p721)(NHC Part 6 p6)

It brought to mind that shortly after Federation Aboriginal people [and Torres Strait Islander (?) were disfranchised despite the protest of a Roman Catholic senator.

"Focus of Study"

"* Struggles for civil rights"

"Behind the Brown v Board of Education was the Rev Joseph Delaine's tireless petition for equal education in Clarendon County, South Carolina." (NHC Part 6 p9)

Some other actions of the civil rights movement are listed on page 9 and then Rev ML King.

"* The influence of Martin Luther King"

5. Recommendation: It is recommended that "Rev" be added to the name of Martin Luther King in this section: "*The influence of Martin Luther King"

COMMENT: Cautionary note: Rev Martin Luther King and all who supported him had a tremendous influence on the civil rights. I wish to offer a cautionary note. There were others who were very significant also. Years ago I read that a group agreed that there were five leaders of particular significance: Rev Martin Luther King, and my recollection may be faulty, but others such as A. Philip Randolph, Ray Wilkins, James Farmer (Farmer initiated Freedom Rides. His father was a minister with academic skills. James studied for the ministry. It seems that a congregation that discriminated decided that the ministry was not his vocation. He worked for the Fellowship of Reconciliation for a time.)

Those preparing the Civil Rights Option may be able confirm that there were five significant leaders and also suggest ways to ensure that students understand that there were others of tremendous significance and the way that they made their contribution.

It is interesting to know that King travelled 780,000 miles in 1957 giving speeches to inspire and white and black listeners to work together for racial harmony. "A generation of black students had moved into their teens years during the Montgomery bus boycott"...these impressionable black students "learned about the incredible courage of King and the everyday folk who walked for freedom...it was a teenage vanguard who kept the civil rights issue in the news..."

(L. Patterson Martin Luther King Jr. and the Freedom Movement. NY Facts on File 1989. Consider for purchase for school library)
6. Recommendation

Ensure that there is a direction in the syllabus that the Rev Martin Luther King’s Kitchen table experience is investigated. It was a significant turning point in his life. It gave him strength and courage in his leadership role.

Many people find it difficult to grasp that a “religious experience of God’s presence” is real and can motivate some people to bring changes to their nation. The opportunity to develop some understanding of this will better equip history students to comprehend those who chose to follow and live a spiritual life.

Another who believed he experienced God’s presence: “At Little Rock Central High School the Rev Dunbar Ogden, was one who led the Nine up to the lines of the National Guard through an angry mob, was a Presbyterian pastor. “Ogden was a rather reticent participant, unsure whether it truly was the ‘church’s business’ to be involved in demonstrations such as this one. Ogden told of what amounts to a ‘conversion experience’ literally moments before he and his son accompanied the students to the school.” (NHC p10)

Dr Robert Coles, a psychiatrist on the faculty of Harvard University, tells the story of six year old Ruby Bridges. Ruby was one of the first black children to participate in school desegregation in New Orleans in 1960. Each day Coles watched Ruby going into school as people cursed and spat on her and threatened to kill her. Two federal marshalls accompanied her. Ruby seemed to talk to herself as she walked between the vicious people. She seemed calm and assured.

Ruby, when asked by the psychiatrist, told him that she was praying for the people. Ruby’s parents had taught her that Jesus, on the cross had prayed for the people who crucified him. “Coles saw a mystery going on in that setting that his academic training and all his medical knowledge could not explain. Ruby was living her faith.” (From Hollow to Whole p.16)

In Australia, a student, John Gowdie, on the February 1965 Freedom Ride had to make a decision whether he would stay on the bus or leave. He opposed demonstrations. “I agonised and I prayed.” On page 128 of Ann Curthoys’ “Freedom Ride”* part of what he wrote was included and has been attached to this submission on page 8. The complete piece was prepared for a class of NSW high school history students. (I have a copy of the complete account.)(*Crows Nest Allen and Unwin 2002)
The Rev Martin Luther King's Kitchen table experience: answer to prayer and deepening sense of God's presence and gift of strength and courage in troubling times. An awareness that this can happen can give students and a new understanding of how such experiences can impact on history.

Death threats to King led to King's "kitchen table" religious experience of God's presence as a (the) turning point in his life."

Former NSW premier Bob Carr said "In an epiphany at the kitchen table in 1956, he decided God wanted him to fight on for justice." (NHC Part 6 p9 and appendix pp17-18)

Abbreviated account from King: King had death threats. He could not sleep. He made a cup of coffee and sat at the kitchen table. "...I prayed...'Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right...But Lord...I'm weak now'" "And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world'...I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight. He promised ... never to leave me alone."


Three nights after, the Rev Ralph Abernathy came up to him during a meeting and said, "Your house has been bombed." "I accepted the word of the bombing calmly," King said later because "my experience with God had given me new strength and trust..." He found his wife and baby safe.

"King's faith that 'God is with the movement' deepened his commitment to justice and sustained him in the struggle...From that point onward, King never doubted God's presence in the struggle for justice..." (James H. Cone (1993) Martin & Malcolm & America. Fount London pp124-5 includes his kitchen table experience.) [See NHC Part 6, page 20] This section includes examples of the way different textbooks treat the topic.

Syllabus: "The influence of Martin Luther King – the ideas and aims of Martin Luther King"

Non-violence strategy: A Methodist minister, was sent to Montgomery by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to discuss non-violence as a tactic with Rev ML King. He gradually accepted non violence as the philosophy & strategy. (NHC p9) [One could assume that there were probably others who shaped the acceptance of a non-violence strategy]
"* Achievements of the civil rights movement"

Note that Christians were key or important people in the Bus Boycott,

Little Rock: Daisy Bates, not a Christian. She was the key organiser in helping the nine African American students to become the first to attend the all-white Central High School in Little Rock. She asked clergy to walk with the students into the high school. Several did. The clergy visited the homes of students and included a prayer time during their visit. Other parents and students also prayed together. September 25, 1957, the nine black students passed through the front door of Central High, guarded by soldiers.

"One of the students, Minnijean Brown, one of the nine, said, "For the first time in my life, I feel like an American citizen."

This brings to mind a German who said in response to the large demonstrations initiated by churches that led to the Fall of the Berlin Wall: "For the first time in my life I'm proud to be a German."

The hostility expressed towards the students, as well as the support, is described in Lillie Patteron's Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Freedom movement, NY Facts on File.1989 pp 39-45. The father of one of the nine was sacked. His wife had to deal with the threatening phone calls. Daisy Bates was threatened with a bomb. The Presbyterian minister had to leave the church he was serving. Daisy Bates and her husband had to close their paper because of lack of advertising revenue. In around the 1960s Aboriginal students were able to attend public schools. (Further details NHC pp10-13, Archbishop Desmond Tutu NHC p22)

"The Freedom Rides": The initiator of the Freedom Rides was the son of a minister. Some of the Freedom Riders were Christians. Many of those involved in the March on Washington were Christian. Note the comment of Malcolm X. See also NHC p13

"the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the role of Rosa Parks "(Rosa is a Christian) (NHC p9) (NHC p -13)

"March on Washington" (NHC p15, Malcolm X pp 24-5) Malcolm X said that the March on Washington "was a sell out...a takeover" by white liberals in government, labor and the churches... "they told those Negroes what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn't make".

"The Civil Rights Act" (NHC p15)

7 Recommendation: That a direction be given in the syllabus that a point of study in the Civil Rights Option be about the contribution of women to civil rights.

Little Rock: "In Little Rock, Daisy Bates demonstrated the obvious - civil rights was women's work, too. In 1957, she faced down an American president, Dwight Eisenhower." (Julian Bond in Wexer p x) An additional point, BIRMINGHAM: Black high school students protested. Christian ministers encouraged and supported. Some students went to jail with their ministers. Students pledged to meditate. (NHC p 14)
National History Curriculum: a submission
[NHC references in Option A submission]
Extracts regarding
Religious Influences

in aspects of the US Civil Rights Movement

This section provides more detailed information for those who require it after having read the outline. There is some repetition in this section. I have introduced the appendices with a brief statement of contents.

"Jim Crow"

"The social movement of the African Americans was an exemplary form of non-party politics – and a frontal challenge to Jim Crow. That was the term used locally to describe the caste system that crystallised during the last decade of the 19th century after the legalisation of racial segregation – the principle upheld by the United States Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. That decision encouraged Southern states and local governments nationwide to disfranchise African Americans and to deny them social and economic opportunities. In general, it allowed the authorities to turn their blind white eyes to the widespread acts of everyday violence against black people." (721 Keane)

Plessy vs. Ferguson case: "...A Presbyterian lawyer had challenged that concept of legal segregation. In 1896, Associate Supreme Court Justice John M. Harlan had argued against the majority decision in the Plessy case that the constitution was colorblind."
(Heuser pp2-3)

The Jim Crow system took three hard knocks during the mid 1950s. Brown v Board of Education 17 May 54, Emmett Till was murdered 1955, Rosa Parks Montgomery refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a public bus. (Keane 722)

1) Brown v Board of Education 17 May 54

"Behind 1954's Brown v Board of Education was the Rev Joseph DeLaine's tireless petition for equal education in Clarendon County, South Carolina."
[Julian Bond, active in civil rights and university lecturer (Wexler p.x)]

The Supreme Court ruling made segregation unconstitutional in the nation's public schools.

2) Emmett Till was murdered 1955. There were 50,000 mourners. The coffin was open so that the damage to Emmett's body could be seen. The murderers were acquitted by an all-white jury. "Their verdict was rendered farcical by subsequent statements by the two murderers that indeed they were guilty." (Keane 722)

3) Rosa Parks Montgomery a committed Christian, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a public bus." (Keane 722)

"Their [Emmett's mother's and Parks'] small acts of resistance proved exemplary in helping to trigger extraordinary efforts by millions of Afro-Americans to find new ways of overcoming powerlessness... (Keane 722) Both were regarded by the white-dominated power structures as nobodies, as simply 'niggers.' (Keane 723) (p97)
4. 382-day boycott of Montgomery buses was endorsed by the Women's Political Council and black churches in the area (Keane 723)

Montgomery Improvement Association... Ministers initiated the Association. Rev Martin Luther King was elected president. Meeting held in Mt Zion Church 5th December 1955. (Wexler 70)

Death threats to King led to King's "kitchen table" religious experience of God's presence as a (the) turning point in his life." (page 9)
Former premier Bob Carr said: "In an epiphany at the kitchen table in 1956, he decided God wanted him to fight on for justice."
[See appendix "Follow the freedom trail"and the additional document.]

5. Non-violence Strategy
"Some weeks after the boycott began...the Fellowship of Reconciliation in New York decided to send a field officer, the Rev. Glenn Smiley, a Methodist minister to Montgomery to discuss non-violence as a tactic with the Rev Dr Martin Luther King. (Feb. 1956) Gradually King began to accept non-violence as the philosophy and strategy of the boycott. (Swomley p112) (Page 9)

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), is an international, spiritually-based network of people committed to active non-violence as a means of personal, social, and political change.

Little Rock High School...1957 Use of troops
6. Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) gained national recognition because of her active role in the efforts to integrate Little Rock Central High School. She gave vital support to the nine black children who were to integrate the school..." (Wexler 306) "Daisy Bates knew beforehand that she, and the students, faced danger." A rock had crashed through her window. "A note was tied to it... 'stone this time, dynamite next'..." (Patterson p39) "Daisy Bates was not associated with a church. She was a black journalist who, with her husband, owned and edited the black newspaper in town. (Page 10)

Arkansas Governor Faubus predicted that "If black students attempted to enter the school, he said, 'blood would run in the streets'."

Daisy Bates began calling local ministers, black and white, and a few agreed to escort the Nine, on their first school day." (Patterson 40)

The Rev. Dunbar Ogden, one who led the Nine up to the lines of the National Guard through an angry mob, was a white Presbyterian pastor. "Ogden was a rather reticent participant, unsure whether it truly was the 'church's business' to be involved in demonstrations such as this one. Ogden told of what amounts to a 'conversion experience' literally moments before he and his son accompanied the students to the school." (Fred Heuser p.4) (Ogden)

On September 4, 1957, when the nine black students sought to exert their legal right to attend Central High, the Arkansas National Guard blocked their entry. The soldiers had acted on behalf of the segregationists. Angry mobs shouted at the students. (p89)
The Little Rock Nine “Their challenge to segregation at Central High School...took tremendous courage and the support of their pastors, ministers, and others.”
[Reggie Finlayson We shall overcome p39]

“Daisy Bates and the nine students refused to give up. A team of NAAACP lawyers appealed to the federal court.” Court orders were issued forbidding the Governor Faubus from interfering with school integration. The governor withdrew the guards. On September 23 students entered the school by a side gate. Hostility inside and outside the school led the principal to sending the students home at noon because he could not guarantee their safety. “The 'Little Rock Crisis' dominated front-page news nationally and internationally.” (Patterson 42-3)

On September 24 President Eisenhower issued an executive order directing the use of troops. “For the first time since the Reconstruction era, federal troops were sent to the South to protect the rights of black people.” “The parents were against sending their children to face the dangers again, but the young people wanted to go.”

“The night before the students were to return to school, two white ministers visited each of their homes and prayed with the families.”

September 25 1957, the nine passed through the front door of Central High, guarded by soldiers.” “Inside the school, each of the nine was escorted by a personal military guard.” “They braved kicks, name-calling, tripping, thrown objects, spitting and more.” They were sent letters from Americans and from overseas which kept their spirits high. (Patterson 44-5)

On 29 May 1958 Ernest Green was the first of the students to graduate. [Rev ML King was present]. Ernest “came from a family which placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of education and personal development. Consequently, Ernest participated in church activities and the Boy Scouts of America, eventually earning the rank of Eagle Scout.” (Wikipedia)

“We all had adults in our families who thought that we had the right to be there,” Green said. His mother and aunt were teachers. Ernest “Green had heard about the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, about the brutal murder of a young black named Emmett Till, and about black athlete Jackie Robison breaking the colour barrier in Major League baseball. “And I was cognizant of the Supreme Court decision” making school segregation illegal,” he said. (American.gov/st/diversity-english/2007/August/2007087)
An article by Hani says “Green was influenced by Martin Luther King, Daisy Bates, Rosa Parks, and Wiley Bratton and others to go into Little Rock Central High School...Green and the other eight students got counselling from Jim Lawson, a [divinity] student from Vanderbilt University and a strong supporter of Martin Luther King Jr. He helped them get through the bullying and the harsh things that the students were saying to them. He gave the students and their families strength to get through it and gave them faith.

Research on others in the Little Rock Nine would show that at least some came from church families, were associated with church activities, and had support of some church people.

For example, Before Elizabeth Eckford, “strong-willed fifteen-year-old” left for the school, “the family went into the living room and prayed together.” (Patterson p.41)

Later in 1958 public schools were closed. In August 1959 Little Rock public high schools reopened. On September 7 Segregationists bombed the Little Rock school board office.

(Wexler 96)

On Bates and Ogden

Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus in forward to “My Father Said Yes”

“They supported each other and by example gave each other courage. Ogden was a man of the church while Daisy Bates held little brief for organised religion...They faced terrible opposition form within their own communities, as well as from outside. Within a year Ogden’s congregation would force him to leave town, and within two years Bates’ customers would force her to shut down her newspaper. But because of their collaboration, they effected a turning point in American education – the integration of Central High School. Justice begins in school.... But in the end, years later, she said, “He was a true man of God.” “Both faced fierce opposition from within as well as from outside. Reverend Ogden lost his church and Daisy Bates lost her newspaper.”

(Ogden xii-iii)

The appendix includes additional comments by Archbishop Tutu.

Rev William Sloane Coffin, a Presbyterian minister, chaplain to Williams College, wrote “A Christian Interpretation” of the Little Rock event in the alumni magazine.


Rev Andrew Young [who became an associate of Rev ML King and later a US ambassador] said, “In 1957, I went [to Little Rock] to meet with the Little Rock Council of Churches...” The Council and others were looking for a way to calm the situation at Central High School. “In our analysis of the problem, we discovered that the kids involved in the violent incidents at the school were by and large those with a history of causing other kinds of trouble. And none of the mainline churches has any contact with these unruly teens though any of their youth programs.”

“We began to meet with school officials to persuade them that they didn’t have an integration problem, they had a discipline problem. The usual troubemakers were getting support form adults who opposed integration, but basically they were the same kids who disrupted classrooms and broke rules before integration began.” [Young then discusses follow-up to these observations] (Andrew Young 1996) 108-9 An Easy Burden NY Harper Collins)

[It would be useful to have other perceptions of the school as well. A.Mills 30.6.10]