

Handout #1
The Fight for Racial Equality

19th Century California

The following questions accompany Chapter 4, “The Fight for Racial Equality,” in *Wherever There’s a Fight: How Runaway Slaves, Suffragists, Immigrants, Strikers, and Poets Shaped Civil Liberties in California*. Each group will answer a set of questions for its section (see heading above) of the text.

- 1) What were the prevailing social attitudes at the time with respect to non-white communities? Choose and write down a quote from the text that reflects these attitudes.

- 2) What political strategy did African American leaders in San Francisco try in their effort to get rid of segregated schools? Why do you think it failed?

- 3) How come the “separate but equal” concept in the *Ward v. Flood* court decision did not have the same impact as it would in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision 22 years later? (How come no one has heard of the *Ward* case, but everyone knows about the *Plessy* case)?

- 4) In *Wysinger v. Crookshank*, the court ruled on “narrow grounds” against school segregation. How come this wasn’t an important victory against school segregation?

- 5) In 1905 the San Francisco school board segregated 93 Japanese public school students. What groups in the community came together to form the Oriental Exclusion League? What interests motivated each of these groups to take action against these students? (Be specific.)

- 6) How did the segregation of the Japanese students get overturned?

- 7) Write one thing down that surprised you from the text. Why did it surprise you? If nothing surprised you, explain why.

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Mendez v. Westminster

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1) What happened to the three Mendez siblings when they went to register for school with their cousins?

2) Why did agribusiness leaders not want Mexican American students to get a good education?

3) What were the “pedagogical reasons” that school administrators used for keeping Mexican-American students in segregated schools? (Why did they say that it was good for them?)

4) What political strategies did the Mendez family pursue to end school segregation in their community? Why did they fail?

5) *Mendez v. Westminster* would impact more than just the three Mendez children. Explain how it grew beyond the claims of just this one family.

6) What “novel strategy” did the Mendez family’s lawyer use? Do you agree with his arguments?

7) What impacts did this successful challenge to segregation have on students outside of California (what does it mean to “serve as a precedent...”)?

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School Busing in Los Angeles County

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1) What did Los Angeles County look like in the early 1960s, and how did this make schools “as segregated as those in the Deep South”?

2) In Judge Gitelson’s landmark ruling in 1970, he claimed that there was both *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in L.A. County schools. Explain what this means. What did his ruling mandate?

3) How did the California legislature respond to Judge Gitelson’s ruling (explain the Wakefield anti-busing measure)?

4) What was the difference between segregated schools in the Deep South and segregated schools in L.A. County?

5) What did the California Supreme Court ruling in 1976 say about *de jure* and *de facto* segregation? How did this ruling set California apart from the rest of the United States?

6) How did the ballot initiative Proposition 1 respond to the 1976 Court ruling above?

7) Proposition 1 was upheld by a 1982 Supreme Court ruling. What did this mean for efforts to desegregate schools that were *de facto* segregated based on residential segregation?

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Williams v. California

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1) What do the school descriptions from 1862 and 1999 tell us about school conditions for many low income students of color in California?

2) What charge did Eliezer Williams in *Williams v. California* make against the state of California?

3) By the time a settlement was negotiated with Governor Schwarzenegger in 2004, how many students were represented in the class action suit?

4) Was there anything in this story that surprised you? Why or why not?

5) Ask for a “Williams Complaint Form” in the main office at your high school. Bring one into class.