

Pauli Murray: Civil & Women's Rights Trailblazer

Overview

A Durham, NC native, Pauli Murray (1910-1985) is a lesser-known civil rights trailblazer whose life, activism and constant courage in the face of adversity made societal advancements that impact us today. The intersection of her crucial work also serves to illuminate the connections between the struggle for civil rights and women's rights. This lesson will provide an overview of Pauli Murray's incredible work, perseverance and accomplishments through class lecture and interactive discussion, and most importantly, through her own words. Infused throughout the lesson are seven oral history clips from a 1976 interview with Pauli Murray, housed at UNC-Chapel Hill's Southern Oral History Program. This lesson will ultimately broaden student understanding of the Civil Rights Movement in terms of the heightened challenges (and thus fight) faced by African American women, as well as bring to the forefront one of the most impactful trailblazers for civil and women's rights.

Essential/Compelling Questions

- What did Pauli Murray accomplish throughout her life?
- What obstacles did Murray confront due to her race and gender, and in what ways did she continue to rise above such adversity?
- What is "Jane Crow," and how did Paul Murray fight against both Jim Crow and Jane Crow?
- Why is it important to recognize Pauli Murray as a crucial trailblazer in the fight for civil and women's rights?

Courses & Grades

This lesson can be used in a number of secondary social studies classrooms, from American History: Founding Principles, Civics & Economics, to American History II, to electives like African American Studies and 20th Century Civil Liberties & Civil Rights. With some modification, it could also be utilized in state or local history units or courses for middle school classrooms.

Materials

- Accompanying PowerPoint available (in PDF format) in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2018/01/PauliMurrayPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
 - So that teachers have detailed information, the PPT as provided is very text heavy. Teachers are encouraged to edit the PPT's information to best meet their particular learning objectives. For an editable version of the PPT, email Carolina K-12 at CarolinaK12@unc.edu with the title of the PowerPoint in the subject line.
 - The lesson procedure notes additional information as well as numerous potential discussion questions to accompany each slide.
- Warm-Up handout, attached
- Pauli Murray Oral history Listening Guide, worksheet attached
- 7 audio clips of Pauli Murray: <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/sets/carolina-oral-history-teaching>
 - These clips were curated from the [Southern Oral History Program's](#) extensive oral history interview database, which contains thousands of transcripts and audio recordings. To access the entire interview with Pauli Murray, click [here](#).

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- These clips are also available as hyperlinks throughout the accompanying PPT
- Teachers should make sure to pause the audio after each clip, otherwise the next segment will automatically play.
- Fighting “Jane” Crow – The exclusion of female leaders in the planning of the 1963 March on Washington, handout attached

Duration

- This lesson is a detailed and extensive overview of Murray’s life and work, to be taught over two class periods.
- Teachers should determine where to break the lesson based on the timing of their own class.

Student Preparation

Students should enter this lesson with a working knowledge of the separate-but-equal doctrine affirmed by the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and the Jim Crow era in general. Students should also possess a general awareness of the Civil Rights Movement, including legal aspects such as the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, *Brown v. BOE*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. (Teachers can provide a few minutes of explanation of these important components during the lesson as well.)

Teacher Preparation

- Make sure all audio equipment and SoundCloud links are working properly.
- The lesson procedure notes numerous potential discussion questions to accompany each slide in the PPT. Teachers may want to consider utilizing techniques such as “Think, Pair, Share” rather than posing all questions as a full class discussion.

Additional Resources (Optional)

- [The Pauli Murray Project](#) - Official website of the Project, which is sponsored by the Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute
- For a list of additional lesson plans on Pauli Murray, click [here](#).
- “[Black, queer, feminist, erased from history: Meet the most important legal scholar you’ve likely never heard of,](#)” Brittney Cooper, *Salon.com* article
- “[The Many Lives of Pauli Murray,](#)” Kathryn Schulz, *The New Yorker* article
- Several books offer excellent information about Pauli Murray, including [The Firebrand and the First Lady](#), by Patricia Bell-Scott and [Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray](#), by Rosalind Rosenberg
- [A Supreme Triumph, then into the Shadows](#)
- [Lloyd Gains, A Lost Hero of the Civil Rights Era](#)

Procedure

Warm-Up: A “Blind” Introduction to the Poetry of Pauli Murray

1. As a warm-up, pass out the attached warm-up handout, project [slide 2](#) of the accompanying power point, and tell students that you are going to play (or read) a poem for them. At this point, do not give students any information about the poem, and do not tell them that it is written by Pauli Murray. Just instruct them that as they listen closely, they should allow themselves to feel and imagine and respond to the poem by underlining or highlighting word/phrases that strike and/or move them, jotting down emotions, thoughts, connections, reactions, etc. in the blank space on the handout, describing or even sketching any images that stick, etc. Let students know that there is no right or wrong – they should just listen and react.
 - Teachers can read the poem aloud, or a reading by Courtney Reid-Eaton at St. Titus Episcopal Church in Durham, NC is available at <https://soundcloud.com/pauli-murray-project/dark-testament-verse-8/s-D1x0D>.)

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2. After students have listened and written their thoughts and reactions, discuss (and chart their general thoughts on chart paper up front):
 - What struck you about this poem? What particular words/phrases stood out to you and why? What images were painted in your mind?
 - What emotions do you think are being expressed and what lines make you conclude this?
 - What message about hope, and what hope is, does the poem convey?
 - What connections (personal, historical, etc.) can you make regarding this poem? What do you think it is about?
 - Whose voice could this represent and what makes you think this? What clues are there that identify who the author might be and what/who they might represent and identify with?
 - What message is the poem conveying?
 - What do you think the author ultimately wants?
3. Tell students that you aren't going to provide any actual information regarding the poem right now, but that the class will return to it at the very end of the lesson, so ask that they keep it in the back of their mind.

Introducing Pauli Murray: Her Early Life

4. Explain to the class that today's lesson will reveal a Civil Rights pioneer to them, one who grew up in their own state: the extraordinary Pauli Murray. Ask students if any of them have heard of or already know anything about Pauli Murray. After students have had a few moments to respond, project [slide 3](#) and provide a brief overview of the day's lesson.
5. Move on to [slide 4](#) and introduce Pauli Murray's early life in Durham. Teachers can share information such as:
 - Pauli Murray is a legal pioneer and Civil Rights hero. She was born in 1910 in Baltimore, Maryland, but spent much of her youth in Durham, NC. From a young age she faced challenges most of us couldn't imagine. When she was three, her mother died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Shortly after, her father sent young Pauli to live with her mother's sister, also named Pauline. Her father was overwhelmed by grief for his lost wife and stress from his job as a teacher in Baltimore, and was eventually confined to a mental hospital. In 1923, he was murdered there, by a guard.
 - Pauli grew up in Durham, living with Aunt Pauline and her grandparents. Her early life was shaped by them, who raised her in their image – to be studious, hardworking, and to not be content with the normal expectations of an African American woman in the south during Jim Crow. Her grandmother had been born as a slave, so her family knew firsthand the cruelty of racism and hate.
 - She graduated from the all-black Hillside High School in 1926 as the top student in her class. She persisted, despite living in a society that was so focused on skin color, and was offered a scholarship to attend a segregated university.
 - Ask students to share what they already know/understand about segregation, ensuring the class has an accurate knowledge before moving forward.
6. Let students know they are now going to hear from Pauli Murray firsthand, through oral history clips they will listen to throughout the lesson. (If students have not been commonly exposed to oral histories, teachers should take a moment to project [slide 5](#) and discuss what an oral history actually is.) Pass out the attached "Pauli Murray Oral history Listening Guide" and explain to students that they should fill this in as they listen to each clip. Teachers can utilize various strategies for listening to and evaluating each clip, depending on the technological resources available:

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- Play the clip for the entire class to listen to together. Have students listen carefully and fill in their notes while listening. After the clip, students can discuss their reactions as a class.
- If laptops or smart phones are available, students (individually or in partners, if headphone splitters are available) can also listen to the clips with headphones from personal devices. (This can often make listening to the interviews seem more intimate and can make for easier listening and concise connections.) After listening, students can discuss their reactions first with a partner then debrief as an entire class.

Pauli Murray on Durham’s “Racial Climate” During Her Youth

7. Project slide 6 and introduce clip #1 (5 minutes, 20 seconds,) letting students know they will hear Pauli Murray talking about segregation and race in Durham during her youth, and its impact on the overall climate. (Teachers might also want to let students know that this interview was recorded in 1976 – when Murray was 66 years-old; she died in 1985.) After students have listened to the clip and had time to fill out their Oral History Listening Guide, debrief and further discuss:
 - Pauli Murray uses the phrase “rough respect” to describe the relationship between resourceful and successful businessmen such as her African American grandfather and affluent members of the white community. What does she mean by this term? What happened to this “rough respect” as the years passed?
 - Murray uses the phrase “the nadir of segregation.” What does she mean by this?
 - What do you already know about lynching? What did Murray share about lynching during this time?
 - The interviewer asks Murray about her awareness of segregation, as well as race-based restrictions and violence. How does Murray respond and characterize her experiences?
 - After students respond, discuss Murray’s quote: “The terror of lynching was always in the background. The awareness of the Ku Klux Klan was always in the background...I suppose this awareness to a child of my generation grows with you just like almost a part of your body and your being. It’s hard to say when you become aware because you take it in all of the time.”
 - How do you think Murray’s experiences during segregation may have impacted and influenced her?

Pauli Murray – Challenging Segregation

8. Move on to slide 7 and discuss Murray’s escape from segregation and move to New York, where she was exposed to early thinkers, poets and Civil Rights activists.
 - After graduation, Murray was offered a scholarship to an all-black college, but refused it on the grounds that she could no longer tolerate segregation.
 - “Underneath it all, I hated segregation so that all I wanted to do was get away from segregation. No more segregation for me. I was 15, but I knew. I had had enough.”
 - She went to New York and enrolled in Hunter College, where she was one of 45 African American women out of 7,000. (After college throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Murray worked for a variety of causes aimed at fighting inequality, racism, and poverty, including for the Works Progress Administration and the National Urban League. Such work helped her see the way that labor groups were organizing and cemented her belief that all people were generally the same – and that all deserved the same rights.)
9. Continue to slide 8 and explain that in 1938, Murray decided to apply to UNC’s Graduate School of Sociology. At the time, it was still a segregated institution. Tell students they will now listen to two brief clips where she discusses her decision to apply and the response. Point out to students the incredible fortitude it took for a woman to challenge the racial dynamics of the south in 1938 in this way. Remind students to fill out their Listening Guide. After each clip, discuss:
 - Clip 2 (1 min., 26 sec.)

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- Why was Murray’s family worried about her applying to UNC? What does this tell you about the society in which African Americans were living at the time?
- Why didn’t her family’s worries, or the great risks she faced in challenging Jim Crow in this way, stop her? What does this tell you about Pauli Murray’s character?

• Clip 3 (6 min.)

- How did Frank Porter Graham respond to Murray’s application? Did Murray accept this rejection?
- Murray mentions the Lloyd Gains case as one she thought would change her rejection to UNC. Have you ever heard about Lloyd Gains? Do you know anything about him and/or *Gaines v. Canada* (1938)?
 - Share with students that after being denied admission to the University of Missouri School of Law in 1935 because he was black and refusing the university's offer to pay for him to attend another neighboring state's law school with no racial restriction, he filed suit. His case, *Gaines v. Canada* (1938), became one of the most important court cases in the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1930s. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ruled in his favor, holding that the separate but equal doctrine required that Missouri either admit him or set up a separate law school for Black students.
 - The story of Lloyd Gaines is incredibly compelling, even beyond his Supreme Court victory, since he vanished soon after the case’s decision. “In the spring of 1939 it appeared, remarkably, that Gaines would enter the Missouri Law School later that year as the first African American ever enrolled there. On the cold, rainy evening of March 19, Gaines told a housemate he was going to buy stamps. He went out...and was never seen again.”
 - For additional information regarding Gaines’s important yet often overlooked case, as well as the mystery of his never solved disappearance, see [A Supreme Triumph, then into the Shadows](#) and [Lloyd Gains, A Lost Hero of the Civil Rights Era](#)
- What did Frank Graham do after Murray challenged her rejection, citing the Gaines case?
- Why does Murray’s application to UNC become national news?
- Why does Murray contact Thurgood Marshall at the NAACP? Why does she think her case is so strong?
- Why did the NAACP reject Pauli Murray’s case? What about her, based on what you’ve learned or on your own inferences, might have led the NAACP to determine she wasn’t a sure win? Why is she surprised by this?

10. Project [slide 9](#) and provide additional information to students regarding the outcome of her UNC rejection and pleas to the NAACP:

- Although the Supreme Court ruled that year in *Gaines v. Canada* (1938) that state schools were required to provide graduate education to black as well as white students, Murray was rejected on the basis of her race. Largely working on her own, Murray corresponded with the university’s president, Frank Porter Graham. She sent copies of their letters to the African-American press and implored Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP to take her case. Her fight for admittance made national news. The university still denied Murray admission, and the NAACP refused to represent her—a decision that was likely based on her “maverick” tendencies as well as questions about her gender and sexual identity. (Source: <http://communications.yale.edu/anna-pauline-pauli-murray-yale-1965-jsd-1979-hon-ddiv>)
- Further discuss:
 - What do you think about the NAACP’s decision to not take Murray’s case? What differences exist between the case of Lloyd Gaines (which won!) and hers?

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- Try and ensure students consider historical perspective while discussing this. (For instance, in 1938, women who spoke out weren't received in the same way as modern society. Murray will address this herself in an upcoming audio clip.)

➤ **Additional optional extension:** Lead a short discussion about modern college applications. Can students apply anywhere they want now? Do we appreciate that freedom? Why or why not? During the discussion, encourage students to appreciate the freedoms that have been won, but also make them aware of opportunities that are still closed to many students. This could be through the lens of financial disparities, undocumented students [facing college admission roadblocks](#), the debate and Supreme Court precedents over [affirmative action in higher education](#), and/or the difference in admission standards and demographics of various schools, from Ivy League to state schools to HBCUs.

15 Years Before Rosa Parks, Pauli Murray Challenges Segregation on a Bus

11. Next, ask students how many of them (by a show of hands) know Rosa Parks, and have a student volunteer briefly provide a summary of her. Ask students how many of them knew Pauli Murray before this lesson (by a show of hands.) Project [slide 10](#) and explain that 15 years before Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat on a bus, Pauli Murray did the same. In 1940, while traveling by bus to visit her family in North Carolina, Murray and a friend were arrested for refusing to sit in broken seats reserved for black riders. Jailed in Petersburg, Virginia, Murray drew on a vast network of friends and colleagues, including Eleanor Roosevelt, for help. Despite initial assistance from the NAACP, once again Murray's case did not become a springboard for challenging the constitutionality of "separate but equal" in the courts. Instead, she and her friend served jail sentences for disorderly conduct. Discuss:

- So, why do we know Parks but not Murray? What is your opinion of the NAACP picking and choosing the cases it took? What is effective about this strategy? Alternatively, what could be unfair about this strategy?
- As a tangential discussion, teachers might also point out other instances of the NAACP's rejection of cases. For instance, while most people know about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott that began in Dec. 1955 (whose case the NAACP argued), few know that there were a number of women who refused to give up their seats on the same bus system before Mrs. Parks. Most of the women were quietly fined, and no one heard much more. Claudette Colvin, for instance, was only 15 when she refused to move to the back of the bus and give up her seat to a white person in March 1955. But, the NAACP refused her case on the grounds that she didn't make for an effective icon/symbol, from issues such as her youth, her appearance, and the fact that she was discovered to be pregnant. (Allowing students to grapple with and debate the fairness of such decisions can make for a great tangential lesson or discussion.) Read more at [Before Rosa Parks, There Was Claudette Colvin](#).

Pursuing a Law Degree: Howard University & Harvard University

12. Continue on with [slides 11-12](#), which discuss Murray's experiences at Howard Law School:

- Back in New York a few months after her arrest, Murray began working with the Workers Defense League, a team of lawyers appealing the conviction of Odell Waller. Waller, a Virginia sharecropper sentenced to death for killing his landlord, claimed self-defense but was convicted of first-degree murder by an all-white poll-tax jury. Despite the efforts of Murray, Ransom, and many others—including Eleanor Roosevelt—Waller's appeals were rejected, and he was executed in 1942.
- The experience galvanized her commitment to study law. In the course of working on his case, Murray met Dr. Leon Ransom, professor of law at Howard University (an HBCU,) who encouraged her to apply to Howard's law school.
- Murray entered Howard University School of Law in 1941. She was the only female in her class, and began to strongly feel the impacts of sexism.

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- She began to study Gandhi’s teachings on nonviolence and led sit-ins at whites-only cafes in Washington, D.C., training her fellow students in methods of civil disobedience.
- Although the sit-ins were successful in forcing some establishments to serve African-Americans, white newspapers refused to cover the protests, and Howard administration demanded that the students end their demonstration.
- Take a moment to discuss:
 - Consider where society was in 1941 regarding women’s rights, and now Murray finds herself as the only female in the most accredited black law school – what would have been difficult or challenging about this?
 - Knowing what you know about Murray thus far, how do you think she responded to dealing with sexism?
 - Why do you think white newspapers refused to report on the sit-ins Murray organized?
 - Why do you think Howard University, keeping in mind it was (and is) a historically black university, demanded the students stop their sit-ins?
 - Consider Murray’s powerful quote: “No matter what happens to you temporarily, whether you are served in a restaurant, or go to prison, or get slapped down, the resources of human history are behind you and the future of human society is on your side, if there is to be any human society in the future. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.” What message is she trying to convey? What does this statement further highlight about Murray’s personality and character?

13. Move on to [slide 13](#) and let students know that despite the challenges she faced in school as the only female student, and the challenges she faced as an African American in society in general, she went on to graduate first in her class! She received a fellowship that should have sent her to Harvard to continue her graduate work, as so many male graduates of Howard had gone before her. But, she yet again encountered an unjust road block. Play the short (1 minute) clip #4 of Murray discussing her application to the prestigious Harvard University. (Remember to stop the clip right at its 1 minute end, or the next clip will begin to play.) Remind students to fill out their Listening Guide and afterwards discuss:

- Why did Murray apply to Harvard, despite warnings not to? What does her reaction to the advice she received and decision to move forward with the application again say about her personality and character?

14. Move to [slide 14](#) and let students know that despite her top grades and a letter from Harvard alumnus and United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harvard denied her application because she was not “of the sex entitled to be admitted to Harvard Law School.” Yet, whereas some people could rightly be overwhelmed by discouragement, undeterred, Murray moved to California and received a master of law degree from Berkeley the following year. In 1946, she was named a deputy attorney general in California, making her the first African American in the state’s attorney general’s office!

Murray’s Influence on *Brown v. Board of Education*

15. Next, ask students who has heard of, and what they know about, the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. After ensuring the students have a correct understanding of the case and its importance, ask if any of them had ever heard of Pauli Murray’s influence on the case. Move to [slide 15](#) and explain that in 1951, Murray researched and wrote *States’ Laws on Race and Color*, a 746-page publication detailing segregation laws and practices throughout the country, which Thurgood Marshall called the “bible” for lawyers working on *Brown v. Board of Education* and other civil rights cases.
- Optional: Teachers who want to go deeper into the legal challenges Murray attempted to tackle can play the five-minute clip #5 of Murray discussing her attempts to challenge *Plessy v. Ferguson* and

segregation as she works on this publication. This clip mentions not only *Plessy*, but also the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, which teachers should ensure students understand. Discuss:

- What was Murray’s strategy for arguing that *Plessy v. Ferguson* was unconstitutional? Which amendments did she use and why?
- What was Murray ultimately working toward with her graduate work? Would you characterize her efforts as ultimately successful?
- Murray eloquently says, “In each case I personally failed. But I have lived to see the thesis upon which I was operating vindicated...I’ve lived to see my lost causes found.” What does she mean? What examples from her entire life do you think illustrate this?

The Fight Against “Jane Crow”

16. Let students know that Murray’s next chapter involved the prestigious Yale Law School, where she earned her doctorate degree in 1965. During this time, Murray’s fight for women’s rights came to the forefront. Ask students if they have ever heard the term “Jane Crow,” and ask them to consider what the phrase might mean. Let students know that it was while Murray was at Yale that the famous 1963 March on Washington was being planned and implemented. Yet, despite the incredible intelligence and commitment on civil rights activists such as Pauli Murray and other women, they were entirely excluded from the planning of that prominent event. Ask students to discuss why they think this was the case.
17. Next, provide students a copy of the attached “Fighting ‘Jane’ Crow” handout, instructing students to read and answer the questions either individually or with a reading/discussion partner. After students have had time to read and consider the questions, discuss as a class:
 - What role were women allowed to play in the 1963 March on Washington? Is this new information to you? Does it surprise you to hear this?
 - What is Murray’s opinion about why this exclusion took place? What is her argument?
 - What is your opinion of the message of this speech?
 - According to Murray and what you know of this time period, in what ways did black women suffer even more injustice than black men?
 - Based on this reading, how would you define the term “Jane Crow?” How is it similar and different that “Jim Crow?”
18. Move on to [slide 16-17](#) to highlight some of Murray’s work regarding women’s rights:
 - Murray’s time at Yale was pivotal. She told a friend that her first year, “while strenuous, has been one of the most significant of my entire career and, for the first time perhaps, I begin to see all the fragments of experience in a hectic life falling together.” In 1961, while working on her thesis, Murray was appointed to the President’s Commission on the Status of Women on the recommendation of her longtime friend and mentor, Eleanor Roosevelt. Serving on the commission’s civil and political rights committee, she developed the novel approach of using the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to challenge discrimination on the basis of sex. Murray used this argument to advocate for a new litigation strategy that would expand women’s rights along the same lines used by the NAACP in its attack on segregation.
 - Around the same time, she helped organize and participated in the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
 - Also, an influential memorandum she drafted, distributed to members of Congress as well as Lady Bird Johnson, helped ensure that “sex” was included in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
 - Murray had long argued that discrimination on the basis of sex was similar to racial discrimination.
 - As a law student at Howard, she first wrote about “Jane Crow” and the double challenges African-American women faced. After graduating from Yale, she and Mary Eastwood published “Jane Crow

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and the Law: Sex Discrimination and Title VII,” in the *George Washington Law Review*, a critically important essay that drew parallels between racial and sex discrimination. In 1971, a young legal scholar named Ruth Bader Ginsburg read “Jane Crow” and used it in her successful Supreme Court case, *Reed v. Reed*, challenging sex discrimination. The argument was so important to her thinking that Ginsburg named Murray and Eastwood as co-authors on her Brandeis Brief.

- Meanwhile, Murray continued to work with lawyers and activists in the women’s movement. In 1966, she helped Betty Friedan found the National Organization for Women, and she served on the national board of the American Civil Liberties Union.
- Discuss:
 - Why are these accomplishments so important, such as Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to litigate for women’s rights – which was a new strategy? Or ensuring that sex was included in the Civil Rights Act of 1964?
 - Do you agree with Murray’s argument that racial discrimination and discrimination on the basis of your sex is similar? Explain. What might this mean for black women during Jim Crow?

19. Use [slide 18](#) to play clip #6 (4 min., 17 sec.) in which Murray discusses the dual struggles of being black and a woman, as well as her fight against what she called “Jane Crow.” Discuss:

- What does Murray mean that “militant feminist” can be a relative term? (Consider what comes to your mind when you consider “militant feminist” in your mind today. Does a picture of Pauli Murray pop up?)
- What does it mean to be radical? Do you think Pauli Murray was a “radical?” Why or why not?
- How does Murray describe her “radicalism?” What does she mean when she says, “I am radical to the extent that I want to see the individual human being as free as is possible, as to fulfil that individual human being’s potential”?
- What does Murray mean by the term “Jane Crow?”
- How does she argue that race and sex are parallel? Do you agree that these were/are equal areas in terms of the fight for justice (then and perhaps today?)

Considering All That Pauli Murray Fought For & Achieved

20. Ask students to reconsider everything they have learned about Pauli Murray thus far (and point out that you can’t even cover every single thing given limited class time!) In a list up front, ask student to call out the various accomplishments of Pauli Murray. Prompt students with questions to help them remember aspects of her life they may have forgotten. Finally, project [slide 19](#) to show the vast list of achievements and causes Murray fought for. Discuss:

- What is so incredible about this list of accomplishments? (For instance, this list would be incredible by any standards. But Murray had real and what could have been debilitating challenges that she faced as a black woman during the Jim/Jane Crow era.)
- Of all that Murray did, what do you think was her most important fight and/or achievement and why?
- In what ways is Murray a civil rights and women’s rights trailblazer?
- Based in the injustice she faced in her lifetime, it would have been perfectly understandable for Murray to give up. Why do you think she didn’t?
- How would you describe Pauli Murray based on everything you’ve learned about her? What do you most respect about her?
- At the start of class, how many of you raised your hand when asked if you’d ever heard of Pauli Murray? (It was likely few if any students.) How is it possible that someone who did all of this isn’t more known/studied?

The Poetry of Pauli Murray

21. Remind students again that Murray did many more things than what you've even had time to address in class, from being an Episcopal priest to writing poetry. Redirect student attention back to the poem that examined during the warm-up and ask students if any of them now have a guess if they know who may have written that poem. Project [slide 20](#) and tell students that in 1970, she published a book of poetry called "Dark Testament and Other Poems." It included poem, *Dark Testament*, which she wrote in 1943. Discuss:

- Review the poem again as you consider Pauli Murray's life and experiences. What particular parts of this poem can you relate to her life and why?
- How does she describe hope in the poem and do you think this is true to how she viewed hope in her own life? Explain.
- What do you think Murray is asking for in this poem? Who is she asking for it?
- Based on what you've learned about Pauli Murray and now knowing the poem was written by her, does your interpretation or feeling about the poem change at all? Explain.

Pauli Murray's Outlook on America

22. In culmination, project [slide 21](#) play clip #7 (3 min., 36 sec.) of Murray talking about America, her love for it, and her duty to help it fulfill its dream. (Remember to stop the audio right at 3:36, after she says "It's a kind of patriotism", or another clip will automatically play.) Remind students to note their thoughts on the Listening Guide then discuss:

- Why does Pauli Murray love America? Are you surprised she has so much love for this country based on the laws and societal norms that tried so hard to keep her down?
- Murray says, "Whatever she hands me, I'm handing her back, with my hope of championship quality. Many of my heroes, my racial heroes, have been the champions...the Jackie Robinsons...the people climbed over and said 'I'll show you.'" How does Murray embody this version of championship herself?
- Why does Murray maintain that American is what she is because of black Americans?
- What does Murray mean when she says, "I want to see America be what she says she is. And I consider it part of my responsibility to do that. It's a kind of patriotism." Is this a common view of patriotism? That by dissenting, and challenging society's norms with the hope of making it better, you are showing patriotism?

- OPTIONAL: Teachers with time may also choose to do a comparison between Murray's poems/ideals and those of Langston Hughes in [Let America Be America Again](#).

23. As a culminating assignment, have students write a letter to Pauli Murray. (Teachers might point out that the interview was recorded in 1976, and that Murray passed away in 1985, so the letter is just for processing purposes.) Project [slide 22](#) to explain the assignment and accept any questions students may have:

- In the last interview clip, Murray says that it is part of her responsibility to "help America be what she says it is." Based on what you have learned in class (and additional research should you choose), write a letter to Murray in which you congratulate her on some of the specific ways you believe she lived up to this responsibility. In your letter, include at least two examples of Murray's activism/achievements during her own life time, and two examples of either:
 - current events that show how America has achieved Murray's dream for it (perhaps that you can attribute to her work)
 - or current events that highlight there is still work to be done (If she has inspired you in any way to do something about it, note that, too!)

If time permits on the date the letters are due, teachers may want to have students share them in partners, small groups, or in front of the class (i.e., choose a few of the strongest samples.)

Name: _____

Warm Up: Listen to the poem as it is read to you. Underline or highlight any words or phrases that strike or move you. Jot down emotions, thoughts, connections, and your own reactions in the blank space below. You can also sketch or describe any images that stick in your mind based on what you hear.

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers
Hope is a bird's wing
Broken by a stone.
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty –
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule,
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,
A name and place for one's children
And children's children at last. . .
Hope is a song in a weary throat.
Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

This lesson plan was completed in collaboration with teacher Davis Harper as part of the 2017 Carolina Oral History Teaching Fellows Program in Civil Rights, sponsored by UNC-Chapel Hill's [Southern Oral History Program](#) and [Carolina K-12](#).

Pauli Murray Oral History Listening Guide

Instructions: Listen to the oral history clip. As you listen, make notes on this guide and answer the questions for each recording. If you miss something, that's okay: We will briefly discuss each recording when it ends. *Remember to listen both to what Murray says, and how she says it.*

Clip #1 (5 min., 20 sec.): segregation & race in Durham during Murray's childhood

General Notes & Reactions (*information that interests or surprises you; phrases or images that strike you; questions you have; etc.*)

How do you think Murray's experiences during segregation may have impacted and influenced her?

Clip #2 (1 min., 26 sec.) & **Clip 3** (6 min.): On Murray's application in 1938 to UNC Graduate School of Sociology, when the university was still segregated and only allowed whites.

General Notes & Reactions (*information that interests or surprises you; phrases or images that strike you; questions you have; etc.*)

Why was Murray's family worried about her applying to UNC? What does this tell you about the society in which African Americans were living at the time?

Why didn't her family's worries, or the great risks she faced in challenging Jim Crow in this way, stop her? What does this tell you about Pauli Murray's character?

Why did the NAACP reject Pauli Murray's case? What is your opinion of this decision?

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Clip #4 (1 min.): Murray discussing her application to the prestigious Harvard University.

Why did Murray apply to Harvard, despite warnings not to? What does her reaction to the advice she received and decision to move forward with the application again say about her personality and character?

Clip # 5 (5 min.): Murray discussing her attempts to challenge *Plessy v. Ferguson* and segregation as she works on a publication that would eventually form the foundation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

What was Murray's strategy for arguing that *Plessy v. Ferguson* was unconstitutional? Which amendments did she use and why?

What was Murray ultimately working toward with her graduate work? Would you characterize her efforts as ultimately successful?

Murray eloquently says, "In each case I personally failed. But I have lived to see the thesis upon which I was operating vindicated...I've lived to see my lost causes found." What does she mean? What examples from her entire life do you think illustrate this?

Clip #6 (5 min.): Murray discusses the dual struggles of being black and a women, as well as her fight against what she called "Jane Crow."

Would you characterize Pauli Murray as "radical?" Why or why not?

How does Murray describe her "radicalism?" What does she mean when she says, "I am radical to the extent that I want to see the individual human being as free as is possible, as to fulfil that individual human being's potential"?

What does Murray mean by the term "Jane Crow?"

How does she argue that race and sex are parallel? Do you agree that these were/are equal areas in terms of the fight for justice (then and perhaps today?)

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Clip # 7 (3 min, 36 sec.): In this clip, Murray talks about her feelings toward America, and why she feels the way she feels about it.

Why does Pauli Murray love America? Are you surprised she has so much love for this country based on the laws and societal norms that tried so hard to keep her down?

Murray says, “Whatever she hands me, I’m handing her back, with my hope of championship quality. Many of my heroes, my racial heroes, have been the champions...the Jackie Robinsons...the people climbed over and said ‘I’ll show you.’” How does Murray embody this version of championship herself?

Why does Murray maintain that American is what she is because of black Americans?

What does Murray mean when she says, “I want to see America be what she says she is. And I consider it part of my responsibility to do that. It’s a kind of patriotism.” Is this a common view of patriotism (that by dissenting, and challenging society’s norms with the hope of making it better, you are showing patriotism)?

Culminating Assignment: Write a letter to Pauli Murray

In the last interview clip, Murray says that it is part of her responsibility to “help America be what she says it is.” Based on what you have learned in class (and additional research should you choose), write a letter to Murray in which you congratulate her on some of the specific ways you believe she lived up to this responsibility.

In your letter, include at least two examples of Murray’s activism/achievements during her own life time, and two examples of either:

- current events that show how America has achieved Murray’s dream for it (perhaps that you can attribute to her work)
- or current events that highlight there is still work to be done (If she has inspired you in any way to do something about it, note that, too!)

Brainstorm:

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Name: _____

Fighting “Jane” Crow – The exclusion of female leaders in the planning of the 1963 March on Washington

At the time of the 1963 March on Washington and in the months that followed, women activists were incensed about their exclusion from planning and leadership in the black freedom struggle. In her November 14, 1963 speech, “The Negro Woman in the Quest for Equality,” Pauli Murray called out male Movement leaders for acting just like any other “entrenched power group.”

In this widely-circulated speech, Murray outlined the dual burdens of Jim Crow and “Jane Crow” on black women. Murray would later be instrumental in ensuring that gender was added to the clause that banned employment discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. She noted that the quest for women’s and African Americans’ rights had historically run parallel and were in fact part of the same larger struggle for human rights.

Excerpt from “The Negro Woman in the Quest for Equality” (Nov. 14, 1963)

Recent disquieting events have made imperative an assessment of the role of the Negro woman in the quest for equality. The civil rights revolt, like many social upheavals, has released powerful pent-up emotions, cross currents, rivalries and hostilities... There is much jockeying for position as ambitious men push and elbow that way to leadership roles.

What emerges most clearly from events of the past several months is the tendency to assign women to a secondary, ornamental or “honoree” role instead of the partnership role in the civil rights movement which they have earned by their courage, intelligence and dedication. It was bitterly humiliating for Negro women on August 28 to see themselves accorded little more than token recognition for the historic March on Washington. Not a single woman was invited to make one of the major speeches or to be part of the delegation of leaders who went to the White House. This omission was deliberate. Representations for recognition of women were made to the policy-making body sufficiently in advance of the August 28 arrangements to have permitted the necessary adjustments to the program. What the Negro women leaders were told is revealing: that no representation was given to them because they would not be able to agree on a delegate. How familiar was this excuse! It is a typical response from an entrenched power group...

What is Pauli Murray’s argument? What is your opinion of the message of this speech?

Based on this reading, how would you define the term “Jane Crow?” How is it similar and different from “Jim Crow?”

Source: <https://nowandthen.ashp.cuny.edu/2010/04/when-women-battled-jim-crow-and-jane-crow/>

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