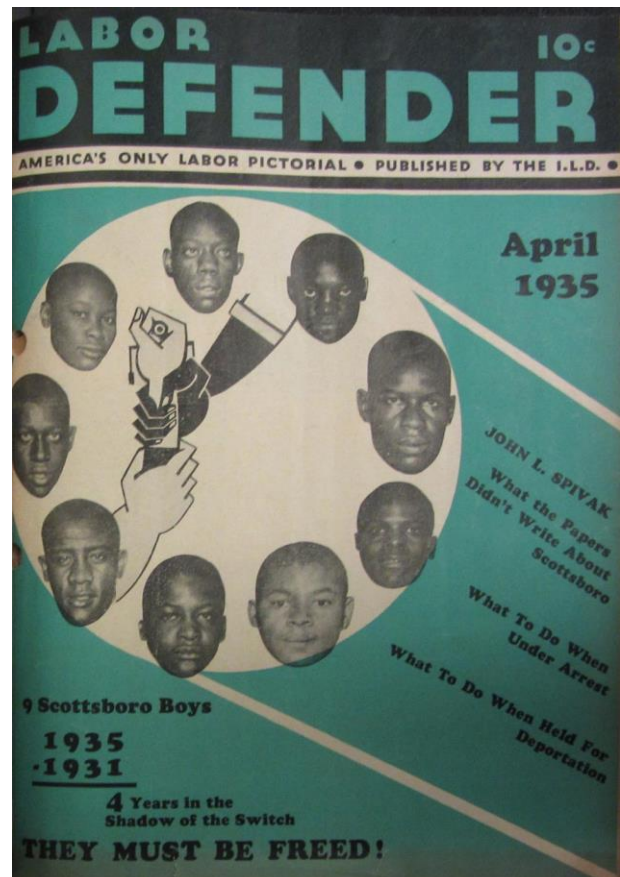
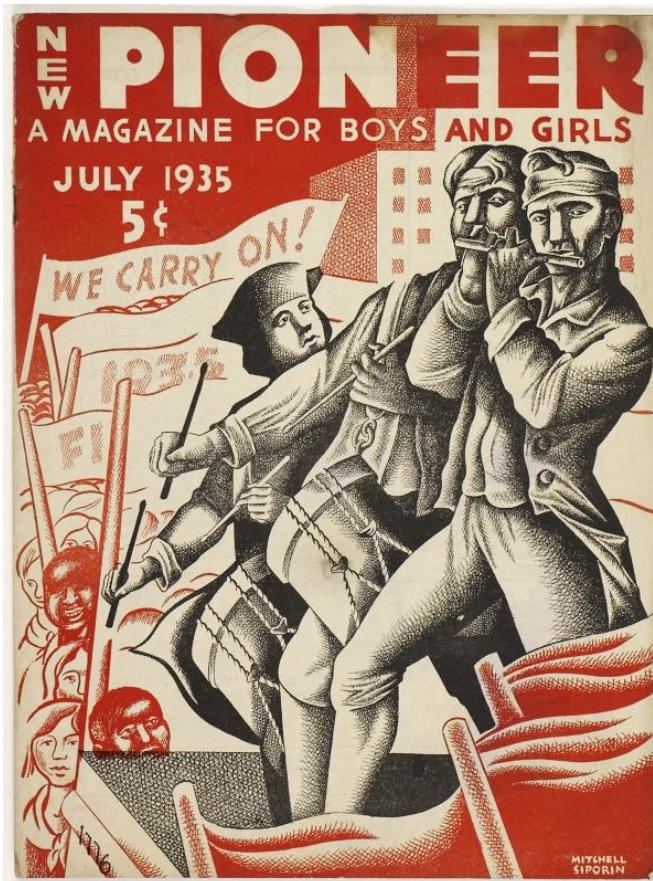


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Promoting Social Action through Visual Literacy: *New Pioneer* & *The Labor Defender* in the Secondary Classroom

by Rachel Jean



LEFT: THE NEW PIONEER, MAY 1933

RIGHT: THE LABOR DEFENDER, JULY 1935

Introduction

In the past, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic have been the foundation of education. In fact, literacy was the primary goal of English education, and the term was defined as the comprehension of textual sources. However, legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Race to the Top Initiative of 2009 brought changes to curriculum and pedagogy across primary and secondary grade levels with waves of standards and assessments. Instead of simple comprehension, educators must teach skills that lead students to “College and Career Readiness,” a term coined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The emphasis on “College and Career Readiness” skills is supposed to educate youth for the purpose of future success in academic and professional settings. According to Common Core Standards, students must “make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains.” The first National Conference on Visual Literacy acknowledged visual literacy in 1969 as “a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing, and at the same time, having and integrating other sensory experiences” (Ladevich 114). Society now recognizes technological platforms as viable knowledge sources in the 21st century. Since the Internet has overtaken former methods of knowledge disbursement, traditional literacy as a singular concept has vanished. In its place, multiple versions of literacy have emerged, including visual literacy.

Common Core and Radical Pedagogy

The mainstreaming of visual literacy via the Common Core and other mechanisms has not come without costs. The federal focus of Common Core and Race to the Top has instilled a fear of failure in American students. Regardless of which administration supported what law, the past decade of policy has paved a path of least resistance to create a competent workforce. While Common Core and its related policies might help create “College and Career Ready” citizens, they congruently place diverse learners at the bottom of the barrel. According to Diane Ravitch (2016), “standardized tests are best at measuring family income,” which is particularly a problem for students who come from poverty-stricken areas with fewer resources. Rather than measuring intelligence, current policies requiring standardized testing and matching curriculums measure what students do not have. For example, when assessments are completed with technology, students in low socio-economic areas will not be able to be as proficient because they do not have unlimited access to computers, laptops, and ipads to learn how to best navigate testing portals or keyboards.

The Common Core is simply a natural progression in a country that remains set against not poverty, but poor people; not barriers to immigration, but immigrants; not racism, but students of color. Crenshaw (1991) states, “Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often

treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (1242). Current curriculum and exams attempt to disguise curriculum concentration on work production by focusing on set skills that are now “required” to succeed. Of course, these requirements leave little room for the development of students who have not had access to needed resources. The new standards erase time for extracurricular activities since students are often testing for hours each quarter. In certain counties in Florida, if students do not perform well on tests, choices for electives are taken away; they are required to take double blocks of reading instead. Thus, failing tests affects a student’s pursuit of self-discovery in the arts, music, and even sports. Instead of directing attention to academic disciplines, schools hold multiple practice preps in order to discover if a student has a potential to pass criterion-based exams. After-school extracurricular activities are replaced with intensive math, science, and reading courses leading up to yearly testing. Teachers must spend their time not only preparing for testing, but also scouring former assessments to discover student weaknesses. While data research methods hold merit, they should not take the place of actually teaching students. For data to have true value, it should be based on high quality instruction, not high quality assessments.

Since the Internet has overtaken former methods of knowledge disbursement, traditional literacy as a singular concept has vanished. In its place, multiple versions of literacy have emerged, including visual literacy.

Consequently, the trickle down from federal demands forces teachers to design practical methods to combat damaging policies. One way of fighting back is to engage in job actions; however, due to weak unions and backlash from districts, teacher strikes are controversial in many communities. On the other hand, some communities have sued the Florida Board of Education. For example, in 2016, in Alachua County, Florida, a group of citizens known as Citizens for Strong Schools, sued the Florida State Board of Education, demanding that they “Fulfill their constitutional duties under Article IX” (Citizens, 2016, 1). Article IX declares that the Florida Department of Education must “Provide a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education” (Citizens, 2016, 1). Citizens were concerned with the disparities among their county’s schools. Yet, Circuit Judge George S. Reynolds III sided with Florida, claiming, “there is not a constitutional level crisis sufficient to warrant judicial intervention” (Citizens, 2016, 8). Reynolds also placed the blame on district school boards for their misallocation of resources. Reynolds insisted that “Plaintiffs have failed to establish any causal relationship between any alleged low student performance and a lack of resources” (Citizens, 2016, 12). The Citizens

for Strong Schools raised their own support to file a lawsuit of merit against the state, but their case was absent from media reviews and they suffered a crippling blow.

Due to experiences like that of the Citizens for Strong Schools, one popular method of resistance in Florida against Common Core is a hidden one designed in the lesson plans of the classroom teacher. Rita Pearson (2013), author of the famous Ted Talk “Every Kid Needs a Champion,” stated, “So teachers become great actors and great actresses, and we come to work when we don’t feel like it, and we’re listening to policy that doesn’t make sense, and we teach anyway.” Pearson’s words, even if they are unknown to teachers, are demonstrated daily. A teacher’s hidden resistance meets the forced superficial standards but also takes students from a place of production to a place of realization, creation, and action. Teachers must use new material in the classroom, validating their choices within the regime of standardized testing, but holding their instruction to a higher goal, past competency and more essential than test proficiency. Teachers resist the ebbing tides of policy by finding methods to teach their students about justice, democracy, and the liberatory paths that others have followed before them.

Although lawmakers try to group students together and claim that new curriculum and standards will benefit everyone, the radical nature behind a hidden resistance is the simple belief that some students—young girls, students of color, those of non-normative genders and sexualities—need more. They need more than the ability to analyze literary texts. They need more than to be able to write an argumentative essay based on a rubric. This belief accompanies another: while everyone might have been born equal, they are not all treated as such. Stereotypes waylay immigrants and black boys. They haunt Middle Eastern students and others from developing countries, such as Haiti. Because students from developing countries are often learning English as a Second Language (ESL), teaching them about democracy and social justice is overwhelming. However, newer practices such as visual literacy can help construct a message of hope, especially with historical images projecting ideals of social justice and the struggles against injustices in society. If students study previous methods of social justices enacted by public groups who have organized to form cohesive and lasting change in situations in history, they could apply those same principles towards current problems of racism, inequality, and other injustices, learning to support and create movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Visual Literacy & Students in the American Classroom

Visual literacy is a newer concept, one that some English teachers might not consider valid. The components of being visually literate include being able to “analyze and interpret images to gain meaning within the cultural context . . . evaluate aesthetic merit of work, evaluate the merit of the work in terms of purpose and audience” and being able to “Grasp the synergy, interaction, innovation,

and/or feel of an image” (Bamford, 2003, 2). This list of abilities is not composed only of skills that fall into line with whatever standards might be policy. Visual literacy implies decision making, recognizing one’s feelings and culture, and owning the meaning behind what one might see. In 1978, Ausburn argued that “we live in an era of visual culture,” which leads to legitimate decisions concerning discrimination, interpretation, and communication (Bamford, 2003, 3). The way students evaluate what they see can motivate struggling readers to read. Images not only distort reality, but can also create it. With technology and media constantly flashing strong images in the faces of young people, their minds are being formed through the way they judge images, interpret them, and discuss them with others. The more visually literate students become, the more successful they can become in judging their own realities. This is not only a valuable skill, but also a vital one, especially for immigrant students and students of color.

As notions of a classic education have been replaced, educators also struggle to teach the most diverse population of learners in American history. The main challenge in teaching visual literacy in the classroom is the plethora of images that have encouraged students to judge images at face value. According to the *Journal of American Culture*, “Educators have a special and urgent challenge to transform lazy looking into visual proficiency” (Emanuel). Instead of critically pondering images to increase creative thought, students tend to be dismissive of images that they passively consume due to the sheer volume currently available. When one considers the number of images available to students, it is not surprising that students would see pictures as a worthless commodity with which they need not actively engage. In fact, students have also developed a similar viewpoint about democracy, partly because it is represented as beyond their reach. Former students have often voiced the belief that they cannot change anything, feeling as if developments within society are beyond their control. In response, I started to insert units on self-esteem into my curriculum (See figure 1), but this small effort seemed to have little effect in shifting student mindset about democracy and the waves of injustice that students are party to on a daily basis.

Due to my belief in resistance through pedagogy, I constantly searched for ways to incorporate units of social justice in my classroom to help empower students to believe in their own ability to have an impact in their communities. I am a middle school teacher at a Title 1 middle school in South Florida, with a “majority minority” student population. While some would call my classroom “urban,” I prefer non-labels that do not carry negative connotations. My students are Black—either Caribbean or African American—and Hispanic/Latino. They are from areas of few resources, in terms of family income, wealth, freedom, and safe resources, such as convenient libraries and parks. As a result, they are often grade-levels behind in their literacy skills. At the age of eleven or twelve when they enter my sixth grade classroom, their ideas concerning stereotypes and racism are not vague concepts or possibilities; they are realities. Each year, students walk into my room defiant, defeated, or both. My goal has

become to share this truth and pair it with the best reality I can offer: They contain the ability to create change.

Visual Literacy in the Classroom: Trial and Error

In order for my students to celebrate success, I often focus my attention on visual literacy, which in turn helps build other literacy skills. Students are on more equal ground when they are studying a picture than when they are attempting to read articles that can be confusing and uninteresting to those struggling with textual literacy. I began my pedagogical practice of using visual literacy when I taught a unit on the Freedom Riders last year. I showed students a black and white picture from the Nashville Sit-ins (Figure 2) and gave them five minutes to answer these questions with single words on chart paper in groups: When do you think this picture was taken? What was happening? How do these people feel? Where are they? When are they? Who are they? List details about their clothes, surroundings, and facial expressions. Their response and the following discussion was so deafening that I realized I had found a key to unlocking their potential. Their answers for the picture above included: "Old"; "eating in a restaurant, probably lunch or breakfast, it's daylight"; "Look surprised, scared"; "guarded, like they're afraid someone might hurt them"; "maybe the 60s, looks like pictures I've seen from then"; "Civil rights"; "poor", "Old fashioned clothes"; "not like criminals." Students proceeded to defend their answers in a class discussion. Finally, students watched a short clip and read a paragraph about the Freedom Riders, and revisited the picture. During the unit, this process was repeated several times, until students became more skilled at finding meaning within historical images. Their response was so positive, I developed a plan to use more images likely to lead to discussions of social justice.

Next, I used images of Malala Yousefzai during a unit on a book about her. As students read the book, they also "read" images of the people of Pakistan, including Malala and her family. At the end of the unit, students created picture books and comic strips as a summary of their learning (Figure 3). I had assumed that, because the Malala story is a more current story, students would be even more riveted. I was wrong. While students did like the story, I did not find the level of engagement that I had a few months before during the Freedom Riders unit. Students were content to be drawing and creating a product, but the connection to visual literacy seemed superficial. Students also were less challenged because the images were readily available. Instead of having to research issues that are not all over the media, they could Google search Malala Yousefzai's name and receive video clips by the dozens. Some students watched the documentary *He Named Me Malala* before we finished reading the book and were then unengaged, as if they had learned everything they needed to know. At first, I could not discover what had gone wrong. I had attempted to replicate the process that had been so successful, but I felt like it was lacking in some way. This led me to question what was so different about the two units.

These questions led me to realize that students were more taken with older black and white images because they held an aura of mystery. Because the photos from the first unit were older and could not be easily found online, they had to read and research to comprehend the images. They also remained engaged in the first unit because, although they had heard about Martin Luther King Jr., Civil Rights, and Rosa Parks, they had never heard of the Freedom Riders and what an impact they made on the Civil Rights process. They were intrigued that black and white citizens would unite for a common goal. A group struggling against an unjust system inspired them. One student remarked, "Malala is special. She had a good mom and dad and stuff. She isn't normal." Students were less interested in Malala because she was so unique and so unlike them. These findings propelled deep research for historical radical images and for topics that would not only interest my students but also teach them about resistance and unity from a less unique standpoint than Malala's experience.

What I found not only supported the demanded rigorous curricula for secondary students, but also increased students' visual literacy skills while providing them with opportunities to study history that is not found in textbooks today.

As I researched visual literacy for my students, the value of historical images began to become clear. Students could track an event through visual images of that event from inception through completion, being able to draw out models of social change through written historical records. It was this search for unique historical images promoting social justice and a study on Modernist radical magazines that led me to discover a unique opportunity for visual literacy curricula. What I found not only supported the demanded rigorous curricula for secondary students, but also increased students' visual literacy skills while providing them with opportunities to study history that is not found in textbooks today. Using photos and images from *Labor Defender* (1926-1937) and *New Pioneer* (1931-1938), radical periodicals with critical content, would allow me to teach students about social change and the importance of education, while promoting the essential components of responsible citizenship and democracy.

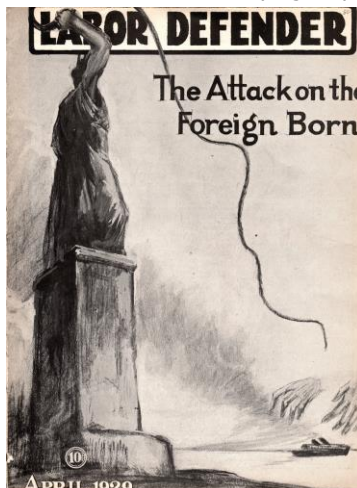
Labor Defender and New Pioneer

During the Modernist movement of the early 20th century, magazines held an important place in American culture. By the 1920s, magazines were a central method of communication. Nearly 100 years later, these rare artifacts contain vignettes of American society, often ignored in the secondary classroom. Images from these magazines have cultural and historical significance beyond the art form. While most magazines from the same time period are worthy of consideration, radical magazines such as *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* are especially valuable. Both publications offer a historical component along with

concepts relating not only to government, but also to social action and reform, which promote a healthy sense of citizenship in secondary students.

Labor Defender was published by the International Labor Defense from 1926 to 1937 as part of the propaganda for the Communist party in Chicago. Their call for subscribers states that *Labor Defender* is “the shield of the workers who have become casualties in the class war. It is the voice of all victims of capitalism....” (O’Flaherty 31). *Labor Defender* was surprisingly diverse for that period in history, concerned with issues of inequality, such as the incarcerations of working class people and political prisoners, the rising tensions in 1930s Europe, Chinese politics, and union strikes against corporations (including coal mining companies and textile companies). As a result, the periodical contains quality photos and illustrations of highly debated events and court cases, featuring multinational historical events throughout that eleven-year period. Most of the images contain representations or realities of the human struggle, like the cover (Figure 4) of the first issue in January of 1926 (Cover). The sketch of a muscular man striving to open a prisoner’s cell is starkly arresting. Students could easily draw conclusions about *Labor Defender’s* purpose as a publication based on this image. There is a determination in the bleak drawing. The rough quality of the image mirrors the mission of *Labor Defender* to represent minority causes and help lower classes against unfair majorities—themes that remained consistent within the periodical throughout its publication.

Labor Defender’s features on incarcerated individuals and the various court cases and actions in America and internationally provide unique insight to issues that are rarely spoken about in the classroom. For instance, in 1927 *Labor Defender* covered the infamous trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both anarchists accused of murder, whose convictions and executions were widely disputed due to the circumstantial evidence against them (Berbusse 83). *Labor Defender* also featured photos of and articles about other radical concerns and events: the brutality of the Chicago police, the children of the incarcerated, lack of career opportunities, timelines of African American injustices (hangings, slavery facts, murders), and the sacrifice of soldiers fighting in the name of democracy. Articles were often paired with black and white photos of victims and fighters, many at meetings or peaceful protests attempting to change their situation. In March 1930, a time when many magazines would not dare to argue for racial equality, *Labor Defender* published photos of a white working woman and another of an African American woman and child (Damon 49). The article, titled “Women Fighters” (Figure 5), compares the struggles of Soviet



women to Black women in America, in the political arena and outside of it (49). Even without the article itself, the images standing alone depict a radical historical viewpoint that is not typically discussed in the secondary classroom setting. Before the Civil Rights movement, articles and pictures such as this were rare. The white woman in the picture is not lovely and poised. Instead, she is obviously a workingwoman of the lower classes. The smaller picture in the left corner of the African American woman shows her in her home rural setting. There is a type of equality to these images uncharacteristic of the time period. Students today could easily use images like these to clarify lifestyles of the time period and to track equality issues, such as Labor Laws and Woman’s Rights over the past century.

Like *Labor Defender*, *New Pioneer* is also a left-wing publication, but was written for young party members from 1931 to 1938. In addition, *New Pioneer* is also fairly diverse, focusing on inequality and struggles around America and internationally. *New Pioneer* is smaller, shorter, and more simplified than *Labor Defender*, to appeal to their intended audience. Despite these facts, *New Pioneer* also has valuable visuals that can be utilized today in the secondary classroom. *New Pioneer’s* visuals contain a monthly comic called “Comrades Kids” illustrated by Jack Herman. Of the four children in the comic, one is a girl, one is African American, and two are white males. The four youth are often seen frustrating or mocking the goals of Caucasian men. One of Herman’s pieces, titled “The Xmas Spirit” (Figure 6) was included in the December 1935 issue (Back Cover). In part of the comic, two Santas are seen taking gifts to “Ritz Town” and “Hunger Ville.” Ritz Town’s Santa is overweight and carrying toys. Hunger Ville’s Santa is skeletal, carrying signs that say “High Prices,” “Unemployment,” and “Closed Schools.” The four main characters are all sitting together on the back of a reindeer, in the middle of the image, holding signs that say “Build Schools Not Battleships.” Herman’s illustration represents *New Pioneer’s* goals: to focus energy on an anti-war, pro-community mindset. Herman’s illustrations can be used to promote a critique of current community disparities in America.

New Pioneer also features poetry, letters to the editor, stories, and news articles in each issue. As with *Labor Defender*, the pieces are accompanied by visuals that are thought-provoking and even argumentative in nature. English teacher Kiran Subhani used photos as a foundation for student-centered research. In *English Journal*, she stated, “Students research a historical overview of the topic, important terminology, contributing factors, relevant facts/statistics, key people and events, what has been done so far to address the conflict, and the current debate surrounding

the conflict" (37). In classroom projects like Subhani's, both *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* would be optimal locations to discover topics of conflict in history that are not a part of the average curriculum. The magazines point to alternative viewpoints and could create lively Socratic seminars and debates, among other uses. Obviously, lessons of visual literacy can be created using *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Teachers could easily defend their choices of images and text, but the true benefit to such sources is to create socially motivated, intelligent citizens with a knowledge base that can change a democratic society for the better.

Some educators might claim that using images in current magazines could benefit students in the same way as *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Current visuals do have a great wealth of information and can be used to help propel students towards social action. Yet, current images do not, as I found with my unit on Malala, contain historical information that has been forgotten and ignored in current textbooks. Students cannot look at a current image and track events through to their completion or analyze the way those actions have affected society today. In such a volatile time, students cannot remain objective in seeing the viewpoints in current issues, but they are able to see the whole picture through the use of historical images, especially images that focus on subjects and situations as intense as those they are facing today. Using older visuals will compel students to deconstruct historical events by researching unknown topics in a deeper way. They will have to create hypotheses about society by searching other forms of media and texts to gain the information they need to form opinions. They will comprehend American culture in a rich way, by examining events, attitudes, and political standing. Finally, they will have opportunities to consider questions about equality, government, and social justice, and will be able to answer those very questions by examining culture today, which will not only strengthen all literacy domains, but gift students with tools to begin changing themselves and their current societies.

Furthermore, the diverse needs of students will be met using *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Historical texts offered in public schools do not present an image that mirrors the current society. Narratives that contain minorities are often heroic or tragic, but primarily contained in Civil Rights, the Civil War, and the Slave Narrative. Rarely do minority students receive the opportunity to view the American struggle as a field for reform, as they will in both *New Pioneer* and *Labor Defender*. For example, in 1928 *Labor Defender* discusses the Obregon Murder in Mexico (Plaza 183). The same issue also contains an article about trade strikes in China (Nearing 189). *Labor Defender* continually followed the Scottsboro Boys trial in 1934. The images in the magazine are much like the one shown here (Figure 7), which is the cover of the April 1934 issue (Black). According to *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*, the Scottsboro trial started after nine black men were indicted for raping two white females in Alabama. Eight of the nine men were given the death penalty within two months of being indicted, although the following year one of the victims took to the stand, claiming that no rape had ever taken place (Scottsboro).

The cover of *Labor Defender* shows a white and black handshake in front of the nine accused young men, claiming racial unity as the International Labor Defense fought to free the youth.

In a similar vein, *New Pioneer* published stories and articles about minorities as well. In April 1936, *New Pioneer* published "The Pet Mule" by Alberta Moore, which was a story (with illustrations) about Ethiopia (14). In December 1935, *New Pioneer's* issue contained an article titled "The Sound of Three Voices" by Angelo Herndon, an African American young man arrested during an unemployment rally (17). Herndon's story is accompanied by pictures of him in prison garb and another standing in front of a podium (Figure 8). Some visuals like that of Herndon will inspire research because *New Pioneer* contains a wealth of information about society for young readers. For example, in July 1935 they published a picture of Jesse Owens, calling him "sensational" a year before he went to Berlin in August of 1936 and returned an American champion (14). In 1937, *New Pioneer* also printed Langston Hughes's poem "Sharecroppers" with a very detailed illustration by Fred Ellis. Ellis's drawing provided a vivid picture of the hopelessness that Hughes discussed.

Undoubtedly, New Pioneer and Labor Defender both have strong ties to the experience of minorities and other oppressed populations, which is a refreshing outlook for secondary students, whose academic literature experience is still dominated by a white male majority.

Undoubtedly, *New Pioneer* and *Labor Defender* both have strong ties to the experience of minorities and other oppressed populations, which is a refreshing outlook for secondary students, whose academic literature experience is still dominated by a white male majority. In *Radical Teacher*, in an article promoting Human Rights and Social Justice Education, Melissa Canlas, Amy Argenal, and Monisha Bajaj practiced "self- reflection (for students and educators), critical dialogue, and 'reading the world' (Freire 1970), which meant examining the social, economic, and political conditions that shaped the experiences of students and their communities" (40). In order to help students participate in self-reflection and a wider analysis of their communities, it is essential that students have access to visuals and literature that discuss social justice and social action. Yet curriculums do not often focus on these themes. In the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Barbara Comer stated, "Literacy becomes complicit in false promises and deflects attention away from the fundamental injustices" (363). Diverse students today will recognize the value of social action, which is the soul of both *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*.

Leading to a Response of Social Justice

After my lengthy research on *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*, I brought some of the images to the classroom. I was particularly motivated by *Labor Defender's* images on incarceration, like the drawn image of a prisoner pointing at the viewer, attached to an article entitled, "The Cause That Passes Through a Prison" (Sept. 1926) and Figure 1, the cover of the first issue included earlier. Students studied the images as part of a unit discussing juvenile incarceration, during which students also read articles and researched juvenile statistics for their areas. Questions were asked during discussions, such as "What are crimes that juveniles should go to prison for?"; "How long should juveniles be kept in detention centers?"; and "What options should a juvenile have upon release?" During the two-week unit, students were also taught about the death penalty and argued the pros and cons of death penalty cases, including cases in which defendants were eventually proven innocent. I used the *Labor Defender* images as a jumping off point, which was highly successful. The students briefly looked the magazine layout of the Scottsboro case and one part of the *Labor Defender* article that accompanied it, which cited the steps that those involved in the Scottsboro case were taking to further their cause. Students were riveted on the topic of incarceration and surprised by the steps that citizens took to advance their cause. For example, the article advocated, "Protests in the form of post cards, telegrams, letters..." and "Leaflets, calling for immediate and mass action" (Damon, 1934, 19, figure 10). The list caused one student to remark, "They could have done better if they had social media!" Another comment included, "Oh. So people are serious about letters to important people."¹ Obviously, a simple review of a one-page article was taken seriously enough by the students to allow them to revise their worldview of what social action might look like.

The next week was project-based, during which partners were asked to research units of interest from a topic list and create presentations for the class. Each presentation would have to include drawn visuals, information about people currently involved with their Social Justice issue, and present day facts. Then, based on the student's reading of the steps taken from the Scottsboro case, students were to list several steps the public could take to help their cause. This Social Justice project, which began with several visual images weeks before, was highly successful. Students were surprised with the facts they found. They created compelling posters that advocated for their causes, based on the historical format that they found in *Labor Defender*. One of the projects included a poster advocating against child labor (Figure 11). The students wrote a poem for children that suffered from the effects of child labor. They also created a crossword puzzle with vocabulary terms to allow their classmates to familiarize themselves with the terms that often accompany child labor laws and concerns. They included a fact list and a comic strip they had created as well. Another pair of students created their presentation on the war in Syria (Figure 12). They created an advertisement to promote buying bracelets from a non-profit organization they had found that sent aid to Syrian

refugees with every bracelet purchased. This group also had a list of websites that students could use to get more information and they created a greeting card to encourage refugees living away from home. Some students struggled to find correct information, wanting to research on "easy" access sites, such as Wikipedia. Others took days to map out a good presentation. The unit needed tweaking, but using *Labor Defender* to begin the discussion and the project was listed as a success. One can see from the included pictures that students took their project assignments seriously and were committed to educating their classmates. Following the presentations, posters were hung in the classroom for a week, allowing students to "visit" issues of social justice, copying website addresses, and engaging in research for their own interests. At the end of the year, students still discussed their projects and continued to believe that they could cause change.

Final Thoughts

Some educators, focusing on requirements alone, might claim that realizing the value of social action is not a formal necessity for students. One might be "College and Career Ready" without comprehending social justice or its purpose. However, being able to recognize the need for involvement in community and country will lead to critical thought in a meaningful context. Social justice is still being pursued around the world and inequalities affect most students each day. Because of this truth, students need to develop a voice for themselves that will lend to critical thought patterns and problem solving. This type of critical process is found within the literacy domains in real texts that can alter the way students view the world and themselves. "This is an increasingly visual world. Without the tools to understand images, society is likely to be less literate and images are more likely to fall on eyes that look but do not see" (Emanuel, Challons-Lipton & Baker). Literacy and all of its domains are the essential component for success. Citizens need to be able to comprehend texts, images, and other multimedia components to flourish in society. Introducing students to a wide range of images and texts will give them some of the tools needed to make sense of their society. *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* are two different sources that will provide students with opportunities to develop questions and find possible solutions to current issues.

Through a discussion of the visuals within *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*, secondary students will see the struggles faced by the average person and will be able to identify themes of injustice. Students will also see the action required of citizens to create change within society. Instead of examining images containing only political information or current information, these visuals will inspire discussion in a way others cannot. Students will also be able use researching skills to develop hypotheses about social actions and the effectiveness of various methods, which is not only engaging but also connecting to the level of rigor educators must seek for students today. Promoting topics of social action through the use of visual artifacts found in *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* will increase literacy and engagement in the secondary English

and Language Arts classroom, creating citizens who are not only able to learn, but want to do so.

Notes

¹ Student observations were from Rachel Jean's second period class, in November 2015.

² Student observation is from Rachel Jean's second period class, in February 2016.

³ Student observation is from Rachel Jean's second period class in April 2016

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