

On June 19, 1865, General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, and announced to enslaved African Americans that the Civil War had ended, and that they were free. Merely 30 years later in 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a landmark Supreme Court case held that racial segregation was constitutional, paving the way for the repressive Jim Crow laws in the South.

On the anniversary of this historic event in American history have African Americans really ever been free of discrimination, have African Americans ever been treated equally? Have they been able to embrace the premise of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal?

In 1931, nine black youths were indicted in Alabama on the charges of having raped two white women. History shows that evidence was slim, but the southern jury sentenced them to death. Although the Supreme Court overturned their convictions twice, Alabama retried them, only to find them guilty. In a third trial four of the boys were freed, but five were sentenced to long prison terms.

One hundred and ten years later, *Brown v Board of Education* declared that racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional and Rosa Parks bravely defied the bus driver's order to relinquish her seat in the "colored section" to a white passenger, as the whites-only section was filled. Park's act of defiance made her an icon of resistance to racial segregation.

There are thousands of examples of racial discrimination through the years, of the unfair and brutal treatment of African Americans, yet as a nation we have not learned from these tragedies. One hundred and fifty-five years later, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery were senselessly murdered.

As educators, we are in the position to take a stand and make real change happen. We are not born as racists or bigots. These are learned behaviors. It is time to examine the curriculums we teach, the books we read and the cultures we establish in our schools. It is time to ensure that our children learn from history so that history does not continue to repeat itself.

As the educational leaders in our state, the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities, the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association, the Maine Education Association, the Maine School Boards Association, the Maine School Superintendents Association and the Maine Principals' Association, stand together in opposition to racism and discrimination, and in support of equality, the pursuit of happiness and equal opportunity for all.

