Walkouts for Black History: The Fight for Our Story

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Individual Website, Senior Division

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As an African American student, I have often felt that the story of my ancestors has been underrepresented in the American history courses I have taken in school. This year, when I learned that my school district was one of only a few in the country that had mandated African American history as a graduation requirement, I was excited and became curious about the history of this requirement.

I started my research by going to the Special Collections Research Center at Temple University where I accessed newspaper clippings and interviews that were published days after my event. There, I also found the Helen Oakes Papers, which were detailed records of the School District of Philadelphia from the 1960s. From these papers, I learned about the integration efforts of the School District, which helped me understand the context of the walkout. To understand the tragedy of the demonstration, I interviewed Melvin Garrison, who participated in the walkout and, as an adult, was an African American history specialist for the School District who helped institute the history requirement. I also interviewed Karen Asper-Jordan, a demonstrator who was brutally beaten and arrested at the walkout and who participated in many demonstrations in Philadelphia throughout the 1960s. I had a lot of primary sources at this point, but I needed some analyses of what happened to help me construct my arguments, so I went to my library and found the books *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* by Matthew Countryman and *Frank Rizzo: The Last Big Man in Big City America* by S.A. Paolantonio, among others.

A website was the ideal form for me to create my project because it allowed me to use my knowledge of html code and allowed me to integrate a lot of different multimedia sources, including videos from personal interviews and images from the walkout. I designed my website so that it would read like a book, starting with context and ending with the legacy of the walkout.

When I was researching, I found the story of what happened the morning of the walkout to be confusing, so I used my knowledge of html code to create a story map and make the walkout easier for the user to understand. I also created a timeline of the black history courses in Philadelphia to help the user understand what happened between the walkout in 1967 and the mandate in 2005.

My topic relates to the theme, "Triumph and Tragedy in History" because the students who fought for African American history were met with strong opposition from the police and many were violently beaten, which was a tragedy. In addition, many white Philadelphians rewarded police commissioner Rizzo for his brutality by electing him as mayor. However, they were able to triumph over the hostility in their city when they got African American History electives in their high schools and in 2005 black history was mandated a required course for graduation in Philadelphia.