

**Teachers' Guide written by  
James McGarry**  
St. Francis High School  
1885 Miramonte Avenue  
Mountain View, California 94040  
[jmcgarry.sf@gmail.com](mailto:jmcgarry.sf@gmail.com)

**Gayle Donsky**  
Executive Producer  
*The Broken Promise*  
[gaylemjs@comcast.net](mailto:gaylemjs@comcast.net)

**Kurt Norton**  
Director  
[KurtNorton@GravitasDocufilms.com](mailto:KurtNorton@GravitasDocufilms.com)

## High School Teachers' Guide for the documentary *The Broken Promise*



### **PREFACE**

A film like this was not made to sit in internet limbo and wait to be discovered. It needs to be seeded now into multiple classrooms and propagate from there. Amidst a multitude of moral challenges in their young lives, our students need to develop a conscience, an ethic, a civic presence that is adequate to respond to genocide—both to intervene and to prevent it. Thanks to resources like this film our students can be made ready for this work.

## OVERVIEW

The following lesson plans offer several options for educators working with high school students studying comparative genocide. The lessons revolve around the documentary *The Broken Promise* and feature a mix of recommendations on how to structure and context the film, prompts for in-class student discussions, ideas for reflective journaling, suggestions for analytical essays and extension activities.

Additional effort is made to provide contextual activities so that students feel em-powered to be advocates and activists for human rights. These particular items are not prescriptive but rather indicative of learning activities in this area that each teacher could choose to include.

## Recommendations for the viewing and study of the film

This film should be integrated into a broad human rights or social justice unit, whether in literature, social studies or other humanities. The curriculum is presented in three successive segments that can be modified depending on how much time the instructor can devote to this resource.

The intensity of studying genocide must be respected at all times. Pacing the film and interweaving less catastrophic material—especially inspiring accounts of moral courage—may be key to the successful viewing of the film.

This guide offers some examples of the kind of conscience that can be developed to be able to stand up to genocide as well as be involved in its prevention.

Following an opening title sequence that introduces the film's themes and focus, including the vow "Never Again, the film has three chapters. **Links to view the film chapters are on page 11.**

1. *The Pattern* (19 minutes)
2. *The Ripple Effects* (20 minutes)
3. *Bending Toward Justice* (15 minutes)

Each segment should be presented on its own day and separated by at least one if not two subsequent class days for both extension and decompression activities.

## Five Social-Emotional and Cognitive Goals

- *Encouraging Empathy and Supporting Solidarity:*  
Guide students to encounter the pain and also the resilience of others who have experienced extreme human rights abuse so that our students are inspired to be among those working for prevention and intervention.
- *Building Awareness and Quickening Conscience:*  
Empower students to believe they can learn this difficult material and detect moral issues and ethical options for personal and institutional response.
- *Establishing Context through Student Research:*  
Lead students to the crucial primary and secondary sources for establishing and understanding historical, political and legal dimensions of genocide and the struggle against it.

- *Opening Paths to Advocacy and Activism:*  
Examine together the work of individuals and organizations active in a variety of these struggles and to see those committed to this endeavor as persons and organizations worthy of our support and participation.
- *Helping students from moral thought to moral action:*  
Inspire students to think of what small steps they might take, individually as moral agents that could lead to a more just and caring community in families, social groups, schools and civic circles.

## **ASSIGNMENT ONE** (pre-viewing)

### **Key Terms.**

Prior to initiating this unit, students should familiarize themselves with the following terminology, concepts, and institutions that are brought forward by the film, along with relevant dates. This can be done as a group process, with or without a vocabulary quiz. The goal is to establish a genocide literacy baseline.

*"Never Forget, Never Again"*

Authoritarianism

International Criminal Court

Antisemitism

Charlottesville demonstration

Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi People

United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Genocide against Rohingya Muslims

Genocide against the Darfurians of Western Sudan

Genocide against the Uyghurs

Genocide Convention

Nazi racial policies

Genocide against the Armenians

Propaganda

Genocide against Native Americans

Hutu Radio

Myanmar's Tatmadaw

Generational Trauma

American Civil Rights struggle

Slavery as part of genocide

## **DAY ONE VIEWING - Chapter One: Introduction and The Pattern**

- A. The Introduction (0:00-2:40) sets the stage for the seriousness with which the world had declared its condemnation of genocide and its resolve to not let it recur, but it also shows the reluctance of many nations, including our own, to both prevent and intervene. Why, as the film suggests, has the pledge become "more aspiration than fact?" What has disempowered us, weakening our 'Never Again' resolve? Our students should remain aware throughout the unit of this discontinuity.

This brief prelude also suggests that we are in a "century of authoritarianism ascending." This too is an important keynote of the film and can lead to productive current events research involving the swift erosion of human rights with the rise of authoritarian tendencies, even in democracies.

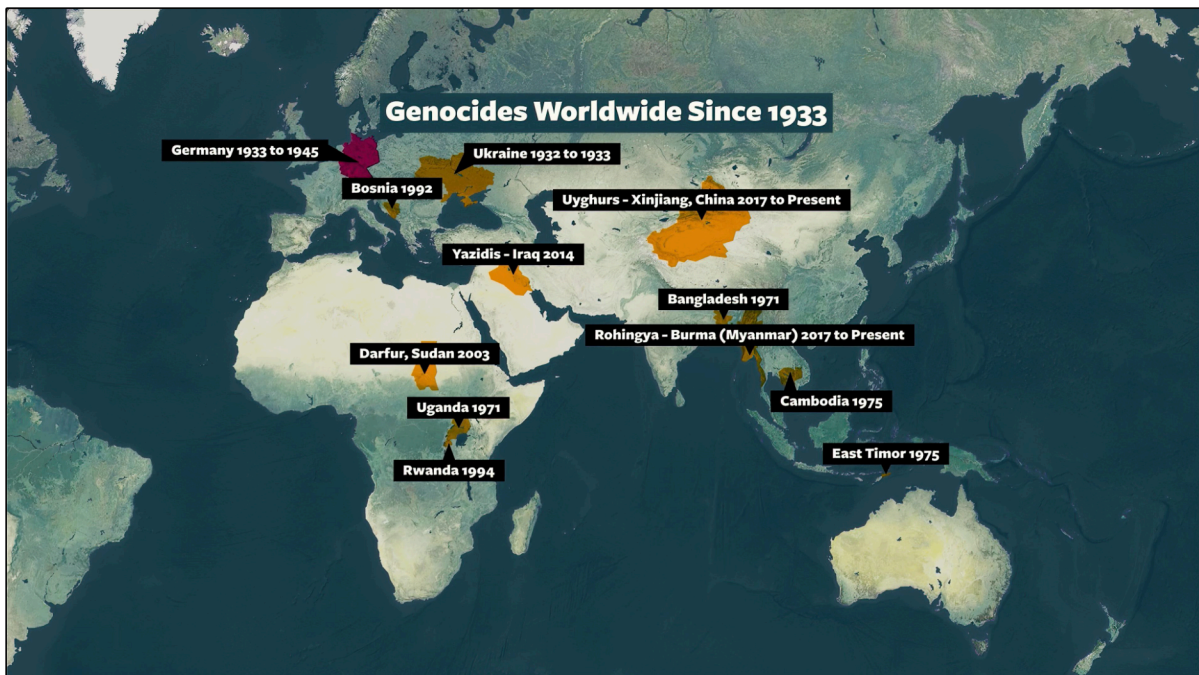
As the opening scenes are about the situation of the Uyghurs, this example should align with student awareness of U.S. and other nations' struggles with China—very much present in the awareness of teens, due particularly to social media controversies.

- Care must always be made to distinguish between the current Chinese government and the Chinese people, and to underscore the irrational outbreaks of anti-Asian violence in United States history, including through the Covid-19 pandemic.

B. Through testimony and compelling historical examples, Part I (2:40-19:30) sets up both a working definition of genocide and a way of perceiving what makes a political event genocidal -- and what makes authoritarian regimes potentially pre-genocidal.

- Discussion could be grounded in either or both of the graphics from this segment of the film: the map and the bar graph here:

To download all maps and bar graph from the film please click [HERE](#)



**Key review** would be regarding the “patterns,” being sure all students are challenged to recognize what the film asserts them to be:

1. The rise of authoritarianism.
2. Propaganda that dehumanizes.
3. Undermining institutions (governmental, legal, religious, educational, social).
4. A culture of silence.

### **Discussion Questions:**

Discussion could start with a gathering of all the knowledge and experience present in the class from the religious and other ethnic identities of those present, drawing from family and community histories. Most of our classrooms have refugees or recent immigrants—including second-and third-generation students—who know or can learn family histories to contribute to the context of the film as it focuses on survivors who were able to flee and/or emigrate. A prioritizing of those family stories from areas of the world convulsed by atrocities can invert some of the social dynamics in a class, where the ‘more American’ may be assumed to be the families longest here. Special care should be paid to the stories of any Native peoples and those whose ancestors were brought as slaves. After attempting this connection with the stories available from the students in the class, learning can move to historical research on the genocides mentioned in the film and charted in the map and graph.

1. Compare and contrast the nature of human rights struggles from your family and community history as it correlates with the “Pattern” suggested here.
2. If authoritarianism is on the rise in the world, is there enough resistance emerging to oppose it? Any success stories? Ongoing struggles?
3. How might fighting for the rights of Uyghurs in China be particularly complicated at this time in history?
4. Identify and discuss family separation in the Black and Native experiences in United States. (In Appendix I, there is a link to a film on the Thomas Residential Schools for Native children in upstate New York.. Also relevant to this is the recent genocide charge against two Russians (including President Vladimir Putin) for kidnapping/family separation actions in Ukraine.
5. What light is shed on your family’s history by the consideration of the recurrence of genocide in our world?

### **ASSIGNMENT TWO** (in groups with specific individual responsibilities)

Ask students to pair a past (or ongoing) genocide with a current authoritarian situation to be able to recognize the “pattern” and to show the potential for genocide in current political states and movements. Students could be assigned in groups to research one of the genocides mentioned in the film—the Holocaust, Darfur/Sudan, the Armenians, the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Uyghurs in China— and look for those four elements of genocide mentioned above.

Assigning research and writing on current authoritarian tendencies in democracies such as Hungary, Turkey, Poland, the Philippines, Myanmar/Burma, India, Brazil could all be good case studies for students interested in those; there are other countries that qualify, including perhaps the United States.

Individual assignments could be made within these historical situations by dividing the narrative along a timeline, posting the basics in a timeline along the board, and assigning individuals to specific periods. The use of a globe and/or other maps can also help with the re-telling of these stories.

- *This dual focus on a past and current conditions of actual and potential genocide empowers the students to imagine each citizen's role in opposing and preventing the erosion of human rights. While authoritarian policies don't always lead to genocide, they certainly fracture communities and fuel injustices and cruelties. As recent events in Brazil might indicate, reversal of these authoritarian tendencies does happen.*

## **DAY TWO VIEWING - Chapter Two: The Ripple Effects**

- A. *The Ripple Effects* starts with the testimony of Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor Helen Farkas and moves forward to her daughter Amber Aguirre discussion of trans-generational trauma.



Helen Farkas



Helen & Amber



Amber Aguirre

- B. This segment deals straightforwardly with torture. This will be new and difficult for many students, especially those who have immigrated from countries that practice it. In the film, the descriptions come from the words, from the direct experience, of those who were victims— and are backed up in several cases by those that love them. Testimony is often accompanied by drawings that are faithful to what is narrated but blunt the trauma often associated with photographs. The key here is careful preparation for descriptions of highly personalized violence and resolute attention to the resilience these victims demonstrate amidst their ongoing suffering—always with empathy for those who perished.
- C. Sexual violence is openly treated on the spectrum from assault on genitals and rape to attacks on fertility through sterilization and other disruptions of the potential for reproduction. The genocide against the Uyghurs is cited as one example of this attempt at genocide by population control. The difficulty of this section is helped by the testimony of the adult children of those who experienced the torture and degradation.
- *Here is a resource from a national organization of history teachers which features a panel of those classroom professionals discussing how to present these topics: [Trauma and Trigger Warnings in the History Classroom: A Roundtable Discussion | The American Historian](#) There are many resources like this on handling sensitive materials.. The counseling departments of our schools might be brought in a partner on the planning and implementing of our lessons in this area.*

## Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on the testimony of Helen Farkas as she recounts her entry into Auschwitz in 1944—and her re-entry with one of her surviving sisters many years later.
2. Along with Amber Aguirre and Nahid Abunama-Elgadi, reflect on the experience they share of second-generation trauma. How might this be further understood by the resolve of Uighur mother Mihrigul Tursun to raise her children “in freedom?”
3. Along with the thoughts of Buffie Schmidt and Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble, reflect on the reality of generational trauma in the United States, specifically in terms of the colonization of Native peoples and the descendants of African chattel slaves.



Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble



Buffie Schmidt



Nahid Abunama-Elgadi

## ASSIGNMENT THREE

Specialize in one of the discussion questions above, for this second segment of the film. *The Broken Promise* website has information for each of the persons above (see link in Appendix I.)

**Option 1:** Share your summary of the film and research focus with an adult in your household or someone very close to and supportive of you. Explore the concept of generational trauma and its meaning for you. Focus on one of the interviewees in the film for your conversation and written reflections.

**Option 2:** Join a small team to bring in a speaker to class—a Holocaust survivor, including second and third generation ones, a refugee from an authoritarian country with significant human rights atrocities, an immigrant fleeing forms of repression in their home countries, would all be suitable choices. Communicating effectively and hosting graciously are an important part of the students' work for this option.

- *These survivors are of course present in most of our communities and often accessible to educators through those that work with refugees. Many individuals might be known by our students. Their testimony is a primary source; after hearing these, our students become witnesses as well. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel: “Whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness.”*

**Option 3:** Art options are particularly suited to this difficult area. Student creative work should always include an “Artist’s Statement” which adds some concepts, history and interpretation to their creation. If possible, create a gallery on the walls, on a board, in the halls, library or other common space on campus to feature these projects. Use QR codes for poems or audiovisual submissions. Sharing is particularly important in this section on torture and trauma. See the work of Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) on the link in Appendix II.

## DAY THREE VIEWING - Chapter Three: *Bending Towards Justice*

*The Ripple Effect* segment ended with a note about “transformational justice” and this third section begins with Martin Luther King, Jr. and his famous ‘Arc of Justice’ oration. An interesting feature of this section is that midway through we see President Ronald Reagan signing the genocide protocols in 1988—after much delay by the United States. Here are some other features of this section which can provoke good discussion and be connected with the extension projects described below.

- The film connects the legacy of American chattel slavery with slave labor in China, where Uyghurs make solar panels among other consumer goods. The U.S. participation in Beijing Olympics is mentioned and United States business executives are shown to be silent or vague on Chinese practices and evasive on the question of boycott.
- In one of several appearances in the film, longtime U.S. Congressman and stalwart social justice advocate, Massachusetts’ Jim McGovern gives American business a no-nonsense scolding on acquiescence on genocide.. McGovern is an example of an American our students should get to know as a person of conscience (a *Profile in Courage* as John F. Kennedy’s book called such leaders) no matter what political leanings our students may have. He has pursued justice for U.S. supported military war crimes in El Salvador, and other Latin American countries, particularly.

**Examples of Extension Projects for Part III:** These project ideas and ones like them may make the *Bending the Arc* theme of the third part of the film come alive for our students. As mentioned previously, these are human rights events that this teacher has found relevant and empowering for students. Each teacher could select ones which they consider most helpful from time and place most relevant to one’s students. These examples all involve problematic U.S. involvement.

1. What was the organization “Olympic Project for Human Rights” and what impact did it have on the 1968 Olympics?
2. Between the events at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City and the recent discussion of a potential boycott at the 2022 Olympics in Beijing, research at least one.

(right) Peter Norman (Aus), Tommie Smith (USA), John Carlos (USA) at the 200 meter medal ceremony. Norman was supportive and wore the Olympic Project for Human Rights patch (left). Smith and Carlos came to the podium shoeless to symbolize the scourge of black poverty amid economic exploitation.



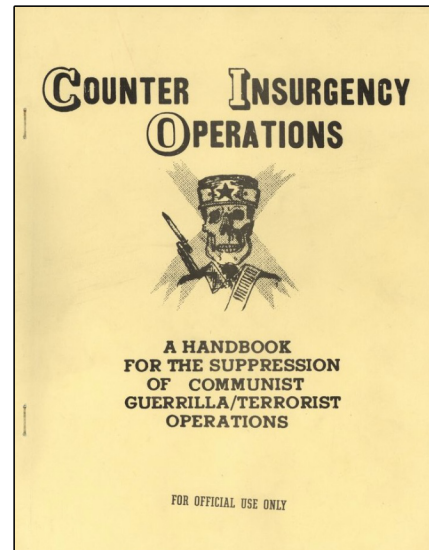


other Olympic year in which a boycott did occur to protest human rights crises? What were the issues and results? After analyzing any two of these situations

3. Why did it take 40 years for the United States to sign the Genocide Convention, which was first drafted and signed by many countries in 1948? How was it finally achieved in 1988? What is the significance of this agreement?

4. Why did it take so long for the United States to officially recognize the Ottoman massacre of Armenians as a genocide? It started in full fury in 1915 and was recognized by President Biden only in 2021.

5. For many years, U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts has introduced a bill to close "The School of the Americas," now known as *The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC)* at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Why? What human rights situations are at stake in this history? What atrocities have been documented by graduates of this school?



6. Another such 'profile in courage' from the World War II era would be Treasury Department employee Josiah DuBois, who uncovered strident antisemitism in the State Department which conspired to keep Jewish immigrants out. His document stands tall in American history, and can be used by students for this current study. (See Appendix I)

*"I am convinced on the basis of the information which is available to me that certain officials in our State Department, which is charged with carrying out this policy, have been guilty not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler...If men of the temperament and philosophy of [Secretary of State Breckenridge] Long continue in control of immigration administration, we may as well take down that plaque from the Statue of Liberty and black out the "lamp beside the Golden door.""*

**Josiah DuBois**  
*The Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews*  
U.S. Treasury Department  
January 1944



7. Eleanor Roosevelt, deeply shocked by the turning away of the German refugee ship *The St. Louis* in 1939, made sure that a similar vessel, *The Quanzaa*, sailing from Lisbon with Jewish migrants, was able to land with its passengers disembarking safely in Norfolk, Virginia in 1942. This and other work by Eleanor Roosevelt with and on behalf of Jewish refugees stands tall.

**Anna Eleanor Roosevelt** was an American political figure, diplomat, pacifist and activist. She was the first lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, during her husband President Franklin D. Roosevelt's four terms in office. As head of the Human Rights Commission, Roosevelt was instrumental in creating the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR), which was approved unanimously by the UN in late 1948.



### Concluding Session/Day 3

To frame and reflect on the call to action at the end of the film, it may be useful to identify different levels/categories for participation and action: institutional, government, legal, movements and organizations, individual acts.

- The teacher might also identify points of engagement: raising awareness; direct action to prevent genocide, respond to genocide, and support victims; advocacy for government and institutions to take action. See Appendix II for some of these groups.
- The concluding frames have some startling content that has a good chance of stirring our students to conscientious response. Elisa Massimo, Executive Director of the Human Rights Institute at Georgetown gives voice to what the images in the film have been portraying throughout: that one hopeful new element of resistance to genocide comes from a world-wide "uprising of women."
- That feminist assertion alone can seed a plethora of summative projects. So can the next frame that shows a session of the International Criminal Court, and then a Pomo language instructor and vice-chair of the Sherwood Valley Rancheria, Buffie Schmidt, extolling the time-honored truth of the importance of small acts of justice in one's own circumstances.
- Second-generation Holocaust survivor and Director of the Simon-Skjoldt Institute at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Naomi Kikoler, gets the last word in the film. In a voice trembling with emotion and fueled by her own commitment to what her family endured, Kikoler says with eloquent simplicity: "If each of us in our own way can help protect others, I hope we take those steps to do it."

## Summative Assignment: Towards Advocacy and Action

The ending of the film should leave our students with a strong interest in more information and examples about what is being done by whom and what actions/efforts with which our learning community can engage.

- Hence, a summative assignment for students could be to research and share information about organizations and activities seems imperative.
- This could include things like a deeper dive into the International Criminal Court, research on civil society organizations and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs ) such as the Center for Justice and Accountability. Examples of both international and country-based boycotts, letters to the editor and personal conversations, can be gathered to offer a view of established pathways. See Appendix II for suggestions.
- A prompt for the concluding paragraph might be: "How and why do I take this history personally?" A more specific prompt would be: "Name and describe three responses I can have to recognize, prevent and intervene in genocide."

## Appendix A: Resources and a Selective Bibliography

The following are links to *The Broken Promise* divided into the three chapters and to a page on the film's website with names and photographs of interviewees as they appear in the film—all great subjects for student formative and/or summative research and writing.

- ***The Broken Promise***  
**Introduction and Chapter One: *The Pattern***  
To view click [HERE](#) - password: promise  
**Chapter Two - *The Ripple Effects***  
To view click [HERE](#) - password: promise  
**Chapter Three - *Bending Toward Justice***  
To view click [HERE](#) - password: promise
- **Interviewees:**  
To view The Broken Promise website click [HERE](#)

A previous film by the same Donsky-Norton team has important material on the genocide against the Yazidi Christians and Bosnian Muslims.

- ***Faces of Genocide*** (33 minutes)  
To view click [HERE](#) - password: FOG3

## Sources related to materials in the film and/or Guide:

1. New York Times articles on Uyghurs  
[Article Collection](#)
2. *No Escape: The True Story of China's Genocide of the Uyghurs* by Nury Turkel  
[Kindle version of this book available on Amazon](#)
3. *A Place of No Return: How I Survived China's Uyghur Camps* by Mihrigul Tursun  
[eBook version of this book available on Barnes and Noble](#)

4. Helen Farkas, *Remember the Holocaust: a memoir of survival*; Santa Barbara, CA: Fithian Press, 1995.
5. F. Samantha Powers; *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*; New York, Basic Books, 2002.
6. Ruth Ben-Giat; *Strongmen: How They Rise, Why They Succeed, How They Fall*; New York: Norton, 2020.
7. Timothy Snyder with illustrations by Nora Krug; *On Tyranny* (graphic edition); New York and San Francisco; Ten Speed Press, 2017 and 2021
8. [Unseen Tears](#) (film.) Ron Douglas, Dir. with Native American Community Services of Erie & Niagara County.
9. Barbara Bender and Wichert ten Have, eds. *The Holocaust and Other Genocides: An Introduction*. NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Amsterdam University Press, 2012
10. Michael Berenbaum, ed. *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*. New York, NYU Press, 1992.
11. Josiah DuBois et al. "[Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews](#)". *The Jewish Virtual Library*. January 13, 1944. For more information on DuBois, the creation of the War Refugee Board and its actions in the last months of the war, see [DuBois, Jr., Josiah E. < Encyclopedia of America's Response to the Holocaust](#)
12. *A Hidden Life* (film.) Terrence Malick, Dir.. Elizabeth Bay Productions, 2019.

## **Appendix B: Organizations for Information, Advocacy and Action**

[The Center for Justice and Accountability](#)

[The United Nations Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

[The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities](#)

[Beyond Intractability](#)

This website lists a large number of national, regional and other organizations.

[Cultural Survival](#)

Specializing in the stories of indigenous people around the world

[Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition](#)

TASSC takes an integrated and survivor-centered approach to its work with survivors of torture.

[Human Rights Watch](#)

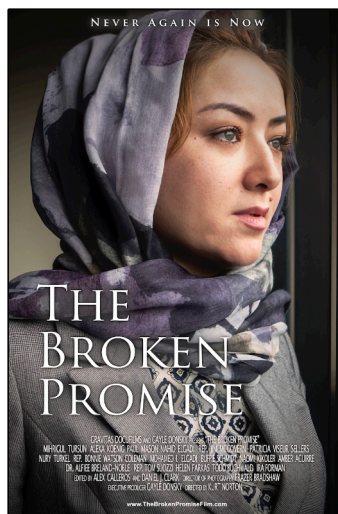
Human Rights Watch investigates and reports on abuses happening in all corners of the world.

## Appendix C: Connections with California State Documents on Common Core Standards and Holocaust and Genocide Education:

1. [Model curriculum for Holocaust and Genocide](#)
2. [Social Science Content Standards, Section 12:9](#)  
p. 58, especially #'s 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.



Lone activist leshia Evans stands her ground while offering her hands for arrest as she is charged by riot police during a protest against police brutality outside the Baton Rouge Police Department in Louisiana, USA, 9 July 2016. A new study found militarized police units are used more often in communities of color. Photo by REUTERS/Jonathan Bachman



Copyright Gayle Donsky 2023