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DISRUPTING CURRICULUM HEGEMONY THROUGH COUNTERSTORIES

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Evolution of consciousness:

Developing an anti-racist practice in a high school U.S. history class

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Narrative is how we as people make sense of the past (Anderson 2013). The hegemonic master narratives of U.S. history, as we teach it to students and as it exists in our collective consciousness in the United States, is one of enduring progress; a survey of the number of U.S. history textbooks tells as much (Loewen, 2018). The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are the curricular standards in public K-12 institutions in Texas. There is no better place to feel the need to counter hegemonic narratives than in U.S. History classes in Texas. All Texas social studies courses have standards to follow, but only two are the tested courses, 8th grade U.S. History and the high school course, U.S. History from Reconstruction to Present. Therefore, teachers need to follow the standards closely, given standard will be assessed as written. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), last revised in 2010 and streamlined in 2018, were heavily contested

and written by a conservative-majority political bloc on the State Board of Education. At issue were both what and whom to include and how events, such as the cause of the Civil War and the "heroism" of the Texian soldiers at the Alamo, were framed in the standards to be taught to students (McKinley, 2010). As they exist, the TEKS is a conservative approach to history; the story's framing from Revolution to present is one of continual progress. The country is always getting better over time. Hardships for minority groups are downplayed or excluded. Initially, there was no mention, for example, of the Ku Klux Klan, either during Reconstruction or its resurgence. References were added during the curriculum streamline in 2018. The very nature of the standards, being a list of knowledge and skills that students must accumulate over the school year, discourages historical inquiry (Kincheloe, 2001). The nature of the standards does not allow for the

possibility of alternative ways to interpret history, the very foundation of historical study. The overwhelming amount of information discourages teachers from engaging students in the work of historians for fear of missing out on valuable tested content.

Because of the standardized nature of teaching U.S. history in Texas and the expectation that teachers will closely adhere to the TEKS, counter-hegemonic teaching falls to individual teachers in their classrooms or like-minded teachers across a department within a district. This is consistent with my experience as a U.S. history teacher in the state of Texas for ten years. However, barriers to counter-hegemonic teaching exist not just structurally but with individual teachers. They must work to address their own biases before or as they address curricular biases with their students. This article will detail my evolution as a teacher over that time as he came better to understand the issues with the standard U.S. history narrative. In response, I created a curriculum that provided a counter to the narrative advanced by the Texas State Board of Education, specifically for the unit on the civil rights movement. The issues raised here focus on the perception of race and racism in the United States history curriculum and broader U.S. society. However, gender, sexuality, social class, environmentalism, and economic inequality were also areas where I attempted to reframe the narrative over the school year.

Reflection on the practice provided insight into how classroom teachers can evolve their counterhegemonic teaching to address the needs of students in particular school environments. Reflection and more profound research into history content transformed my willingness to subvert hegemonic standards from theory into the curriculum used with the students. They also changed the way that I approached

conversations around race and other areas of systemic oppression. This work should be reflective of the student needs of a particular place and should drive student learning. It should engage students in constructing historical knowledge, helping students develop their critical consciousness (Ladsen-Billings, 2014). My focus area for this work was curriculum on the Black freedom struggle, notably the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and how it connects to contemporary issues of race in the United States. I chose this area of focus because it was where I received professional development that empowered me to restructure the study unit. While this article focuses on an individual teacher, teacher education and professional development for continuing education will support teachers in deeper learning and challenge their understandings of master narratives and how they either replicate or disrupt students.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

I taught high school U.S. history to 11th graders at two very different campuses within a large urban school district in Texas. I am a white woman, part of the 79% of white teachers across the country (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). I grew up in rural Southeast Texas in a working middle-class family and was one of a handful of my high school classmates who went off to college, graduated, and moved to a city. My undergraduate and graduate degrees were from Texas institutions. However, my undergraduate work in history was completed at a medium-sized state school on the far outskirts of a large urban area while my graduate program in social education at a large urban university. My transition from undergraduate to graduate work accompanied my own political and historical conscientization, a process that also coincided with work as a substitute teacher in area schools. The history that I was reading

did not match what I saw in schools. This strengthened my conviction of becoming a high school teacher to serve my students' needs by creating an empowering curriculum and engaging them in the historical process. When I finally stepped into my classroom, I had a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in social studies education. I had also started doctoral work in social education, an approach to social studies education that emphasizes critical pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy as foundational principles and grounds social studies work in critical theory. Despite my academic background, my understanding of translating theory into effective practice was evolutionary and ongoing. More importantly, my experience at my two campuses greatly informed my work in constructing curriculum and why I chose to do it. My schools and students helped define my journey as a social studies teacher. Given the different needs of the two campuses, my experience at each place catalyzed diving deeper into my content knowledge. I knew the history well enough to reframe the narrative using more contemporary scholarship. It also helped me constantly question whether I was meeting the needs of my students over the years as I attempted to respond to those shortcomings.

One Teacher, Two Campuses

The context of my work matters significantly to my teaching, not just for retelling but also because reflecting on contextual factors helped me connect better the choices I was making in my curriculum to the needs of my students. Despite the two schools being in the same school district, located but 20 minutes away from one another, the campuses had different racial and socioeconomic student populations and differences among the teachers. Both campuses were located in a large urban school district. The campuses also had very different organizational

structures. These factors meant that the students I was teaching across the different schools had very different experiences that they were bringing into the classroom. It also meant that the school climate, including the students, teachers, and the schools and the relationships between the three, created different experiences for the students.

My first campus was a de facto segregated high school located about five miles outside the city center. The school was a large (3,200 students), traditional comprehensive high school. Over 80% of the students in this school are Latinx. It impacted the way that my students discussed race with their teachers and in history. The students understood the racial politics of the school, where 80% of the population was Latinx (the other 10% a mix of Black and Asian American). A significant portion of their teachers was white, and most of those teachers did not live in the community. Many of the teachers left the school after 1-2 years of teaching. While I taught several different social studies classes there, I mainly taught juniors in AP US History. Conversations about race were open compared to what I have experienced at my second school. Students asked questions about my background, frequently named "whiteness" and white culture as different from their own cultures, and worked to apply this to the history they are learning. Developing and incorporating a critical race lens in this school came more naturally because most of my students approached U.S. history from a non-white perspective and could see the disconnect between the hegemonic historical narratives centered in their curriculum and their own lived experiences.

The second campus is a selective magnet high school where students apply from across the city and outside the district. Its demographics do not reflect those of the broader school district. Despite seeming

more racially diverse on paper, the predominant group on campus remained white. The teachers were also almost entirely white, many of whom were alumni of the school. Additionally, several taught in surrounding suburban districts before transitioning to work at the school. It took me two years to work at my second campus to fully understand the differences between the two teaching spaces. Rather than the open, fluid discussions of race from my previous campus, I got the sense, from mostly my white students that they were not prepared to have such frank conversations, despite many of them identifying as socially liberal. Their apprehension made me apprehensive, and I struggled to connect with a very different group of students. I found myself exemplifying elements of what King and Chandler (2016) identify as "White Social Studies," such as employing "common sense, essentialized understandings of race to reify the historical status quo" (pg. 10). Two years into my teaching there, I was made to realize that the color-evasive attitude of the school and my adopted complicity in that was harming all of my students. This came in the run-up to and following the election of 2016. At that time, schools grappled with navigating national conversations of police brutality towards Black men in the summer of 2016 and the growing political tensions surrounding the election. The students' concern was brought to the attention of the school by a group of Black students who pushed back in many ways within the school. Although it made me uncomfortable at the time, they also pushed back within my classroom because they perceived me to be complicit in what they thought was a school and teachers who ignored their unique experiences.

This raised several critical questions for me as I sought a way to understand better what was happening and how I could have more deliberative conversations about race

and, in the process, discovered the need to rethink how I was approaching my history curriculum philosophically completely.

1. **Why was I willing to have candid, vulnerable, and critical conversations about race with my students of color at my first school and not have them at my second school?** Asking critical questions and explicitly addressing race, class, and students' experiences felt more manageable when I taught students who were predominantly not white. Having white students seemed to reinforce a white cultural hegemony while discouraging more critical and diverse perspectives despite having greater student diversity.
2. **What role could my curriculum play in sparking critical conversations? How could I use my curriculum to counter the hegemonic narrative of U.S. history and help all students better understand the historical roots of contemporary social and economic inequalities to have an informed understanding of national conversations about race and other social justice issues?** Although I had taught some curricula that I felt encouraged students ask questions or consider history from multiple perspectives, I felt like I was still not doing a good job of connecting the past to the present so that students could better understand the context of ongoing issues, such as economic inequality, racism, and gender inequality, among other things. I was not explicitly naming and defining racism nor connecting issues surrounding the Civil Rights Movement and its complications to the ongoing struggle for racial justice.

3. What new content knowledge did I need to support these conversations and translate theoretical and historical information into the everyday curriculum? While my graduate school work focused on critical pedagogy and the need for culturally relevant teaching, I did not feel that I had enough specialized content knowledge to fully implement curriculum that accurately countered the hegemonic narratives in many facets of the U.S. history curriculum. I had not taken any African American studies courses or any ethnic or gender studies courses that might have exposed me to the critical theory that would have allowed me to ground my curriculum. To address this, I enrolled in two professional development opportunities that focused on American identity in the Gilded Age and a Black humanities seminar that focused on Black rebellion through American history. I also focused my reading and podcast selections on reflecting what I felt were my gaps in historical knowledge.

These three questions focused on my work, beginning with my reevaluation of my civil rights unit, the focus of this article.

BUILDING A CRITICAL TEACHING LENS

Gramsci (1971) defined cultural hegemony as the cultural, moral, and ideological leadership of a group over other subordinate groups derived from a coerced consent of those who have been subjugated. The dominant power gains popular consent through the social studies pedagogical process, a form of learning that engages people's conception of the world to transform them with perspectives more compatible with the elite (Giroux, 1992, as

cited in Kincheloe, 2001). State-mandated curriculum standards further help codify what is considered 'official knowledge,' privileging what is worth knowing by requiring it to be taught to students (Apple, 1993). It implies that what is not standardized thus is not worthy of knowing. What is the hegemonic narrative in the Texas 11th Grade United States history class? Overall, the U.S. history curriculum is defined by the themes of American exceptionalism, individualism, and an emphasis on free-market capitalism (Kincheloe, 2001; Loewen, 2009; Loewen, 2018; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). These three themes are interrelated. They include the following characteristics as either framing devices for the story of history that students are told in class, absorbed from popular culture, or how they understand history as a discipline:

The Hegemony of the Progress Narrative

The progress narrative is a facet of American exceptionalism used as a way of telling the American story that assumes that the United States is always moving forward and getting better (Kammen 1993; Loewen 2018). It downplays any lingering inequities that may exist because once an issue has been somewhat addressed, be it legislatively or socially, that issue has been resolved. Examples include the Civil Rights Movement and resulting civil rights legislation, which did make significant strides towards equality for Black Americans by removing some legal barriers. It also further complicated lingering inequities by obscuring systemic oppression embedded in society outside of the scope of the law (Kendi, 2016). It made systemic racism more challenging to name and describe because the civil rights legislation seemingly addressed it and removed legal barriers. It also made both lingering racism and inequality easier to individualize, removing the blame from systems and, therefore, out of the responsibility of government action. Racism, both in

curriculum and broader society, is characterized as the problem of ignorant individuals or bad people and not the responsibility of much of the population (King & Chandler, 2016).

In the TEKS related to the Civil Rights Movement, this looks like compartmentalizing discussion of civil rights into the Progressive Era and Civil Rights Movement. The fight for civil rights is not discussed beyond the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The language of the TEKS implies that civil rights legislation involved only successful outcomes, including one standard that asks students to "evaluate changes in the United States that have resulted from the civil rights movement, including increased participation of minorities in the political process" (TEKS, 2018). This essentialist language discourages connections to the ongoing struggle for racial justice as it implies that civil rights legislation adequately addressed many of the issues that activists protested.

Emphasis on the Individuals Rather Than Collective Action, Heroes over Communities of Action

The theme of American individualism leads to an overemphasis on the role of individuals in movements, such as the Civil Rights movement, suffrage movement, and labor movement. It fits into broader American ideals, which stress the importance of the individual via self-reliance in their industry instead of relying upon the community or, worse, the government, for their successes. By teaching the advancement of rights resulting from the actions of individuals rather than the organization of broader action groups and coalitions, it distances students from the understanding of the role that ordinary people play in creating community change. Rosa Parks, a foot soldier in the NAACP and lifelong organizer, then becomes a hero whose individual bravery

students can aspire to match while her long-term activism and organization, as well as the broader collective action, is erased from the narrative (Alridge, 2016; Theoharis, 2018). It discourages students from engaging in potential acts of resistance because they see barriers to exceptional bravery rather than simply participating in civic organizations like the NAACP (Kohl, 1991). It also obscures the groundwork of rank and file civil rights activists, namely on the long-term organizing of the community rather than individual acts that do more to call attention to injustice but might not singularly sustain the movement.

White-washing of Historical Figures

White-washing of historical figures goes hand in hand with the emphasis on the individual. It also comes in the form of exclusion of certain groups or movements that might be seen as more radical because they challenge the narrative of American exceptionalism. For example, in the Texas standards, Malcolm X is excluded entirely, as are many activists who would give students an understanding of the diversity of perspectives among civil rights activists. Instead, students are asked to "compare and contrast the approach taken by the Black Panthers with the non-violent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr." (USH9.E). This creates the perception that 1. The Black Panther Party and King stood in opposition to the guiding philosophies of one another, an oversimplification, 2. That the views of Dr. King were static, erasing the evolution of his thinking throughout his life and responding to a changing Civil Rights Movement and 3. There is a false binary of "right" and "wrong" ways to protest injustice.

By distilling the guiding philosophies of the Civil Rights Movement down to two competing perspectives, the TEKS essentializes the experiences of activists in the civil rights movement and the challenges that they face. In doing so, this denies

students the opportunity to fully understand the challenges faced by activists and why philosophies and tactics changed over time.

Racism and Inequality as Individual Failures Rather Than Systems of Oppression

While this was referenced above as an effect of the teaching of the progress narrative, it is also a standalone issue related to the broader emphasis on the individual in society and curriculum. Issues of oppression throughout American history become instances of individual blame by bigoted people rather than the product of a system designed to privilege white cisgender men above others (King, 2019). It leaves students with the perception that continued oppression exists because of bigoted individuals. In addition, it perpetuates the idea that everyone in the country is given an equal chance to succeed; therefore, if they do not, it is because of their own failures and not because of a system designed to produce such results. For white students, in particular, this emphasis on the individual helps them evade thinking about ways they benefit from such a system, which would connect past injustices to the present while giving them a permission structure to rationalize the shortcomings of non-white peers and minoritized groups in broader U.S. society.

Identifying Racism as Limited to One Region

Finally, the hegemonic narrative draws a firm distinction between the North and South regarding blame for racism in the Jim Crow era and into the present. The South is taught as the backward, racist, and conservative perpetrators of racist policies and individuals, while the North is free of this evil. Erased are discussions of the violent push for school desegregation in the North, redlining policies that barred integration of neighborhoods, and the emergence and

popularity of the Ku Klux Klan in northern and western states after its resurgence in the 1910s (Rothstein, 2017; Theoharis, 2018).

EVOLVING TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

While these topics are ways in which the curriculum upholds the master narratives of the Civil Rights Movement, teachers' personal beliefs and practices also reinforce hegemonic narratives. Howard (2003) argues the need for teachers to interrogate their own experiences with race and class to understand how they will relate to and work with diverse groups of students whose lived experiences might not match their own. While he emphasizes the importance of doing this critical identity work with pre-service teachers, practicing teachers should also routinely interrogate their biases to encourage continued reflective action with students and the curriculum they teach.

Martell and Stevens (2017) connect teachers' perceptions of history and their teaching goals to their approaches to implementing their history curriculum. They outlined two different approaches teachers took to the history curriculum. First, tolerance-oriented teachers emphasize that students should gain tolerance for, or learn to live with, people who are different from themselves. These teachers see their primary roles as helping students to understand racial differences and conclude that it is wrong to discriminate based on race. These teachers might also focus on learning about personal bias, stereotypes, and ways to end discrimination.

While it may seem as if nothing is wrong with tolerance-oriented teaching, it fails to help students contextualize the contemporary social issues they see and experience with their past root causes. It may even fail to acknowledge that contemporary inequities are lingering effects of problems that were not "solved" in the past, such as the Black struggle for civil rights. Instead, it

focuses on individual prejudices rather than helping students understand the historical systems that perpetuate oppression and how they, the students, may fit into or can act as agents within these systems today.

This is a common approach across history, emphasizing perpetrators of oppression like racism as bad people and that the fight for social justice is one of changing minds. For example, Wills (2019) examines a social studies curriculum unit on the Civil Rights Movement. In documenting teachers' use of these curriculum units, Wills found that despite the social justice focus of the material, racism was defined narrowly to the students as individualistic and the result of people's choices (Wills, 2019). Wills also echoes King (2019) and Martell and Stevens (2017) in acknowledging the need for greater racial literacy on the part of teachers. They believe that by doing so, teachers can better navigate both standards and curriculum for and with their students so that they can better address systems of racial equality rather than perpetuate individualistic racism.

Ibram X. Kendi further explains the limitations of viewing race through a tolerance-oriented lens:

“When you make it about ignorance, you’re also making it about individual people and you’re not making it about power and policy and structures and systems. That the problem centrally is not America’s institutions. It’s not the American story,” he said. “It allows people to deny how fundamental racism has historically been to America.” (Garfield & Gladstone, 2018, para. 12).

Kendi argues that educating individuals to be more tolerant is not enough. If we intend to address racism, we need to be aware of and act against oppressive systems.

Historians such as Kendi look to reframe telling United States history through a critical race lens, one that eliminates American exceptionalism and pushes back against the narrative of progress. Instead, Kendi looks at the dominant political, economic, social, and cultural structures and asks whom they benefit and who does this oppress? These are questions of power and privilege that can help students understand the structures that continue to exist in the United States. While social studies scholars have long critiqued the dominant curricular narrative and are moving towards conceptualizing anti-racist curricular frameworks, they have also noted limitations in the content knowledge of teachers and their own racial literacy that prevent them from adequately and accurately addressing issues in their curriculum and with students (King, 2019; 2020). For social studies teachers to better teach the history of race and racism in the United States, they will need to address their racial literacy and broader content knowledge. Martell and Stevens (2017) contrast the tolerance-oriented teacher with the equity-oriented teacher. They define equity-oriented teachers as those who emphasize helping students understand how race has been a factor in many historic and present-day events. Such teachers specify that there is a system of advantage based on race. They describe this as being essential for advancing their students' understanding and reducing racism in the present.

“The equity-oriented teachers’ lessons demonstrated how they connected race to inequity, often through teaching systematic racism. They take a more active stance toward helping their students understand and disassemble systematic racism in the present” (Martell and Stevens, 2017, p. 496). The equity-oriented teachers have a fundamentally different understanding of systems of inequity in the United States

and look for ways to help their students build that understanding.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

The framework for understanding teachers' approaches to curriculum-making outlined in the previous section mirrored my growing consciousness of the complexity of representing race and racism in the curriculum to my students. What I was looking forward to doing with my students is moving from a tolerance-oriented curriculum to one centered on an equity understanding of U.S. history. I wanted to speak to the lived experiences of my students of color while challenging the tenets of the dominant narrative in curriculum to help my white students engage in the questioning of systemic prejudice that they did not often realize because of how it privileges their experiences. To do this, I first had to increase my content knowledge by reading, listening, and attending professional development that framed history in critical and critical race perspectives.

Once I began to address what I felt was my lack of content knowledge over the Civil Rights Movement, I began to reflect on my curriculum and how I had framed the Civil Rights Movement in the past. I wanted to identify areas where I felt that I was upholding a “common sense, essentialized understandings” and where I relied on the “transmission camp of social studies theory” (Chandler & Branscombe, 2015, p 63). Three areas of focus emerged that I felt needed to prioritize the framing of my U.S. history curriculum. These three areas are places that I chose to most immediately make changes to my curricular framing and how I asked students to engage in historical thinking.

I needed to use up-to-date academic language with students and give them the tools to help describe systems of oppression

to connect the past better to the present.

Before my curricular revisions, I relied heavily upon what I assumed students already knew about race and racism in the United States. By not explicitly defining racism with my students, I allowed the perpetuation of the status quo: the individualized definition of racism that erases the identification of systems of oppression in the United States and their ongoing impact. To address this, I knew that I needed to be more direct with my students in discussing racism and helping them to redefine racism using academic definitions.

To do this, in both my Advanced Placement and on-level U.S. History courses, I used the work of historians such as Ibram X. Kendi and Richard White and more alternative texts such as podcasts (Scene on Radio: Seeing White, Revisionist History). Across these works, students were introduced to academic terminology and historical explanations for phenomena across U.S. history. They included the social construction of race in the American colonies as described in the podcast series Scene on Radio: Seeing White episode “Made in America” (Biewen, 2017) and the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity and its impact on the United States after the Civil War (Kendi, 2016; White, 2017). They also included the intersections of sociology and history to help students build a critical framework for understanding the evolution of race and racism over time. In *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi identifies racism and anti-racism, and *assimilationism* that helps describe the various and complex ways that racism has been woven through American identity over time and how that has translated into policies of discrimination (Kendi, 2016). I also used the work and language of Robin DiAngelo to help students identify the difference between intentions and outcomes in racist beliefs and policies. By doing so, my students could

understand the successes and limitations of civil rights legislation in the 1960s on both institutional racism and individual/collective understandings of race, especially for white people in the United States (Dixon & Anderson, 2018). To help illustrate the tension between intentions and outcomes in well-intended policies, students listened to the podcast *Revisionist History* episode titled Miss Buchanan's Period of Adjustment. In it, Malcolm Gladwell revisits the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, unpacking the ideology of the Supreme Court members and the impact of desegregation on Black schools, teachers, and students (Gladwell, 2017). This is similar to the critical race analysis of *Brown v. Board of Education* by Ladson-Billings (2004), who discusses the long-term effects of the court's decision and the rise and decline of its enforcement. Students also learn an updated definition of racism, defined as social and institutional power plus race-based prejudice. It allows them to move from seeing racism as the work of ignorant individuals to a system in which our country participates and must work against it actively.

By exposing students to the professional, contemporary terms used to describe history, racism, and sociological factors of inequality and providing students with opportunities to apply these ways of thinking to what they view as traditional stories of the civil rights movement, students begin to question the hegemonic narrative. This questioning reveals a tension between the story of optimistic progress and the lived experiences that they discover in the past and helps them to account for current inequities. They used this newly developed understanding to question, for instance, why many schools in the school district remained segregated mainly, despite *Brown v. Board of Education* and how that segregation impacted whether or not they felt a school was "good"

or "bad." By helping them redefine racism as not due to individual ignorance but through evolving systems of oppression, students can redefine what they know about how to work, organize, and create meaningful change.

I needed to create lessons and activities that emphasize critical thinking skills rather than accumulating factual knowledge.

Because the traditional narrative of U.S. history as outlined in the TEKS emphasizes the accumulation of historical knowledge instead of historical thinking skills, students miss the opportunity to practice historical inquiry to understand better cause and effect and historical context (Loewen, 2009). Before revising my curriculum, I fell into the trap of being a dispenser of historical knowledge, telling a story of U.S. history instead of giving my students space to practice historical inquiry skills. I felt this discouraged my students from engaging in the lessons. It also made what we were studying seem as if it was not open for discussion or interpretation about the things that were happening in the present. The way I was teaching the Civil Rights Movement made it seem less relevant because I did not allow students to engage in history.

Historical thinking skills can help students unpack the historical knowledge they carry and better understand people, events, and actions through the lens of the time in which they happen (Wineburg, 2018). Students' understanding of concepts, such as racism and the Civil Rights movement, is often a result of their contemporary socialization and divorced of its meaning from its original historical context (Lesh, 2011). Historical thinking skills can also help students see how historical perceptions change over time (historiography). They can also see the critical questions that arise when

examining who gets to shape historical narratives that involve allocation of power, including upholding civil rights, guarantees of voting rights, and equal educational and economic opportunities.

For example, in my U.S. History Civil Rights Movement unit, I wanted my students to understand the shift between the non-violent, southern-focused sit-in movement that targeted desegregation of public places and voting rights to the more militant Black Power movement of the later 1960s. The traditional narrative contrasts these two movements as competing strategies, with the underlying message being that there is a "right" and "wrong" way to protest (Theoharis, 2018). Black Power is also conflated with the riots of the late 1960s in Watts, Detroit, and Newark as a way to classify the ongoing Black freedom struggle as violent and dangerous to law and order, far overshadowing the root causes of these issues as being the result of racist urban policies that hollowed-out cities, stripping them of resources and locking poor Black citizens in under-resourced cities. I wanted my students to understand that the freedom struggle was not a comparison but an evolution. That evolution is based on the changing policies that failed to address urban, northern policies and racism and instead emphasized desegregating public spaces without fully addressing underlying poverty elsewhere. The Great Society policies of the 1960s attempted to address some facets of inequality by increasing federally-funded jobs training, college funding, and expanding the welfare. However, it was limited because of the Vietnam War and because its implementation was often informed by racist research such as the Moynihan report. After students learn about significant events, I have them work in groups to select seven primary source documents that they feel represent the shift in tactics, philosophy, and backlash in the Black freedom struggle from 1955-1970.

Students then create a timeline of their documents, paraphrasing the document and then explaining why the document represents the time in which it was created to offer historical context. After students complete their timeline, they must explain how and why the Black freedom struggle changed over time and identify some things that stayed the same to examine continuity. Students can explain that tactics and philosophies changed to address different issues in different parts of the country even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1964 and 1965. Students also identify the continuity of white racism during the time, from explicit racism in the Jim Crow period and backlash to school desegregation to the emergence of "law and order" policies by the end of the 1960s. Therefore, students began to develop a more complex understanding of the causes and effects of the Civil Rights Movement, and they began to call the traditional narrative into question. Students also called into question the efficacy of civil rights legislation instead of seeing how it complicated the ongoing struggles of racism.

I needed to emphasize history conducted by historians rather than the tyranny of a dominant textbook narrative.

The primary critique of relying on textbooks is that they provide a 'tyranny of omniscience' that discourages students from understanding that the work of historians is that of discourse; historians build arguments that are interpretations of history utilizing their analysis of evidence (Loewen, 2008). It means that there is one dominant narrative that a student can learn that will give them a complete understanding of history. While I was not relying on a textbook to teach my course before my revisions, I relied on the TEKS unquestioningly, thus presenting a static history that reinforced the hegemonic narrative. It not only denied the nature of the

professional discipline of history, but it also discouraged my students from seeing themselves as agents of historical interpretation themselves, arguably one of the most potent components of developing critical consciousness (Freire, 2000).

It is vital for students to engage with the study of history as historians do, be aware that different historians have different interpretations of the past, and that those interpretations can change over time as new facts emerge to add deeper understanding to events and people (VanSledright, 2008). Students need to understand its significance for several reasons. First, it helps students see that a more authentic study of history requires them to develop critical thinking skills used by historians crucial for them to develop as future engaged citizens (Levinson, 2010). Second, the underlying understanding for students is that there are multiple perspectives to history and that the perspectives of a minoritized group may be different from the experiences highlighted in the traditional narrative but equally valid in its perspectives (Santiago & Castro, 2019). Finally, as students become more sophisticated in their understanding of how historians work, they will evaluate the arguments made by historians and better understand their own beliefs of the past.

In my class, I asked students to work with both primary and secondary sources. When learning about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, students in both classes read the introduction of *A More Beautiful and Terrible History* by Jeanne Theoharris (2018). While students are initially given questions that focus on their comprehension of the text for the class discussion, they are also asked to identify the historian's argument of the text and the evidence she uses to support it. During this same unit of study, students are also given two different perspectives on the effectiveness of the Great Society. Again,

students must employ historical thinking skills as they assess who the author is and how this informs the author's perspective on the success of the Great Society.

I also wanted students to engage with alternative texts to help them understand that a creator's point of view extends beyond written work. Students watched Ava DuVerney's *13th* (2016) and answered similar questions identifying the creator's argument, how the film deals with questions of race, and the evidence that the creator uses to advance their explanation of the impact of racism since the 1960s. The result of students' engagement with multiple historians' perspectives was that they could better articulate an alternative way of viewing the Civil Rights Movement and its long-term impact instead of relying solely on the narrative advanced by the TEKS and the dominant culture. Though not thorough or universal, this work gave students a language to better describe the connection of past historical events to contemporary social and economic inequality.

LIMITATIONS

While I felt that I was successful in shifting the conversation about racism, systems of oppression, and the bias of progress in my U.S. history classes, I also felt that there were limitations to my work. These limitations are both within my classroom and within the broader educational system and society at large. First, while I felt I had been successful in disrupting the narrative for many of my students, I do not think that I was as effective in cultivating critical habits of mind, such as critical thinking skills, which would be transferrable to other parts of the U.S. history, inside and outside of the classroom. While I had worked to transform my curriculum similarly for other units of study throughout the school year, I felt that this was disjointed in my on-level U.S. history class. This lack of continuity throughout the year

contributed to the lack of education on transferability. To address this would require continued historical research to identify primary and secondary sources that could be used for units on other time periods in U.S. history.

Despite these limitations, I felt that this transition did allow me to have more complex conversations about race and the history of racism with most of my students across my Advanced Placement and on-level classes. I still felt that some of my white students were apprehensive about talking explicitly about race at the beginning of the unit. In this sense, equipping them with a language to describe their emerging race consciousness or, for some who felt more comfortable and knowledgeable already, a space to continue that conversation helped them deepen their understanding. For Black, Latinx, and other students of color, this gave them a space to reflect on their experiences and learn a history that affirmed what they felt were experiences of bias, in school or out, from white peers or the broader society. Students relayed these comments as side conversations in class, through reflections, or in seeking additional information outside of class. My journey towards a more culturally relevant practice and equity-oriented approach to teaching will always be a work in progress. What I have outlined throughout this article helped me engage better all of my students in conversations about race and history that are critical to our country's future in this time of a resurgence of explicit white supremacy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers must be mindful of the students, the community, the school climate, and the diversity of needs and reflect on how best to construct a counter-hegemonic curriculum and the teacher's work. It is the root of

culturally relevant teaching. Teachers must also have deep content knowledge and racial literacy to counter the hegemonic narrative and encourage historical thinking in their students. Even though progressive teacher education programs emphasize critical pedagogy, social justice, and awareness of life experiences that might inform teachers' biases to teaching, they might not fully prepare teachers to teach counter-hegemonically without preparing teachers with content that will empower them to deconstruct and reconstruct problematic standards and lesson plans. Teacher education programs can address this by requiring students to take ethnic studies courses that build into pre-service teachers' work in teaching and methods classes.

Schools and school districts can also play a role in the continuing education of their teachers by encouraging or providing professional development opportunities that allow teachers to continue their professional learning as it relates to culturally relevant pedagogy and counters the hegemonic narratives. It might include engaging in ongoing partnerships with universities, museums, or other educational institutions that will encourage reflective practice in teachers and continued learning of content that is up to date with current trends in the field of historical and educational inquiry. Without the opportunity to engage in professional development that gave me space to learn and discuss critical race interpretations of history, I would not have been able to deconstruct and reconstruct my curriculum. Providing teachers with access to high-quality professional development and support can increase their capacity as curriculum makers who understand the construction of limitations of the standards such as the TEKS and feel confident in engaging students in work that counters the hegemonic narrative those standards perpetuate.

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