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**WHITE, AWARD-WINNING HISTORY TEACHERS' NARRATIONS OF RACE,
ANTI/RACISM, AND WHITENESS**

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

White, Award-Winning History Teachers' Narrations of Race, Anti/Racism, and
Whiteness

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

This dissertation study explores how white, award-winning history teachers narrate the role of race, racism, whiteness, and antiracism in their identity formation, in their understandings of society, and in their teaching of history. Drawing from a nationwide sample and utilizing surveys and semi-structured interviews, this project explores teachers' racial ideologies, antiracist pedagogies, and their navigation of their state and local contexts, especially those affected by anti- "CRT" legislation or policies. The dissertation provides an overview of teachers' narrations of race and related concepts, homing in on places of consistency and discordances in ideological articulation. This analysis leads to a focus on certain teachers' 'ideologies in pieces' (Philip, 2011), whose articulations of race and teaching commitments appear to conflict, contradict, or operate in tension, which tend to be spaces ripe for learning and transformation. The study follows with an overview of teachers' navigations of anti- "CRT" movements, highlighting factors that contributed to their feelings of constraint and/or resolve, seeking to understand how these conceptualizations collide

or coalesce with teachers' contextual factors such as student demographic population, community type, school type, school politics and more. Finally, the study reports on teachers' various acts of creative insubordination (Gutierrez, 2015), in service of teaching from critical and equity-oriented frameworks, highlighting the specific practice of history-specific disciplinary practices, whereby teachers drew upon disciplinary history and historical thinking practices to continue to teach critical history with fidelity to their mission despite external threats, legislative and otherwise. Most broadly this work seeks to understand the circulations of racial ideologies via history teaching.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Explanation of the Study

This dissertation aims to show the ways in which racial discourses circulate, to uncover the racial ideologies that underlie histories taught, and to denaturalize race. Beyond this, in studying white teachers, this dissertation turns the “research eye” onto whiteness itself (Daniels, 2018), moving beyond understandings of white racialized selves and white racial identity and towards locating the impact of white racial knowledge (Leonardo, 2008) and exploring its traces on the racial histories that white teachers deploy.

History teachers are tasked with representing the past to their students and have been found to act as curricular and instructional gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991). Because race, racism, and whiteness have played central roles in nearly every social studies topic (Reisman, Enumah, & Jay, 2020), I argue that social studies/history teachers are likely among the most prominent purveyors of comprehensive racial learning, described by Winkler (2012) as “the process through which [people] negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of the various and conflicting messages they receive about race, ultimately forming their own understanding of how race works in society and in their lives” (p. 4). Given this potentially important role in facilitating and fostering particular racialized worldviews for students, this dissertation study pursues questions of how white history teachers who won their state’s history teacher-of-the-year award conceptualize race and related concepts and how they describe

applying these ideas in their teaching; the contextual factors informing their views and commitments; and how they are navigating their particular sociopolitical contexts given the onslaught of anti-“Critical Race Theory” (CRT) attacks on teachers across the nation.

A good deal of research on race/racism in social studies education has focused on white pre-service teachers’ affective reactions (and frequent resistances) to learning about race and racism (Hawkman, 2020; Smith & Crowley, 2014; Crowley & Smith, 2015; Garrett & Segall, 2013). Other research has captured the ways in which hegemonic, white-centered history/social studies topics and epistemologies, termed “White Social Studies,” persists in textbooks, curricula, and state standards (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016; Chandler & Branscombe, 2015). Still, the pervasiveness of whiteness as connected to the construction of race and the enactment of racism has only begun to become an area of focus in social studies education research (Hawkman & Shear, 2020), and research on antiracist pedagogies and programmatic efficacy in fostering antiracist teacher candidates has tended to be detached from explorations of the ways in which disciplinary history content can be connected to antiracist projects (Hawkman, 2022). Additionally, even in social studies education research reliant on Critical Race Theory, race as a socially constructed phenomenon has rarely been studied (Busey, Duncan, & Dowie-Chin, 2022). Finally, the history taught in schools has once again become a target of the right-wing state apparatus in the latest phase of “culture wars,” this time with an eye trained on “CRT.” Given the renewed public attention to the ways that teachers are teaching about race and racism,

this study also explores teachers' negotiation of these complex sociopolitical dynamics, shedding light on the ways that they are navigating increased constraint and surveillance and their use of various strategies, tactics, and disciplinary practices to evade scrutiny and/or recrimination.

In the realm of teacher education and whiteness, a significant amount of research has looked at the deficit perspectives and prejudices that white teachers hold about their students of color (Daniels, 2018), documenting deflective patterns to avoid engaging in topics related to race and racism (Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 1993). Little is known about what white teachers know and teach about the history of whiteness, and less has been written about the interstices between historical knowledge, white racial knowledge (Leonardo, 2008), and the ways that white teachers bring together those two areas with their students.

To capture award-winning history teachers' range of understandings about race, this exploratory, mixed-methods study examined teachers who won their state's teacher of the year award, a contest hosted by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History through their National History Teacher of the Year (NHTOY) Award, which has been awarding history teachers each year since 2004. By recruiting participants from this sample, I was able to locate a range of teachers' perspectives on race/racism and provide detailed analysis of how this expert group of history teachers negotiated the intersections of race and history teaching. The study drew upon surveys with demographic and Likert-scale questions distributed to a sample of GLNHTOY winners from the last 15 years and a purposeful sub-sample of

teachers who agreed to participate in a semi-structured interviews, I rely on a theoretical framework that draws upon theories of race as a floating signifier (Hall, Gilroy, & Gilmore, 2021), racecraft (Fields & Fields, 2014); history teaching as a racial project (Omi & Winant, 1994), and ideological articulation (Hall, 1986; 1996); and used methodologies aligned with those theories and my research questions including symbolic interactionism, narrative analysis, critical language studies.

Studying the ideological reproduction and disruption of white supremacy through history teaching is important because it occurs through many different channels with the effect of protecting a white supremacist status quo. As Hagerman (2018) reasoned, “without understanding how people learn dominant ideologies and how these ideologies are reproduced and reconstituted, we cannot entirely understand how racism (racial ideology) both persists and mutates into new forms” (p. 14). Finally, as Lewis and Diamond (2015) explained, race-based status beliefs that emerge from history “shape how we understand others and ourselves, how we make sense of the racial landscape in which we operate, and how we act and interact” (p. 3-6). Given this very important responsibility, what teachers believe about race and the historical examples they do (or do not) provide matter a great deal when it comes to the reproduction of various racial ideologies and the protection of existing racial hierarchies.

Setting the context

This dissertation project was first conceived while I was on maternity leave during the spring and summer of 2020. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbury, and Breonna

Taylor were the among the latest Black people to have been brutally murdered by state-sanctioned actors including police and former police vigilantes. The details of their murders were, in large part, recorded by onlookers and/or perpetrators and as result, the world watched the life drain from George Floyd's face as he called out for his mom; heard the sounds of gunshots in Breonna Taylor's last moments of life; and experienced the white conviviality that accompanied the terrorizing pursuit of Ahmaud Arbury's final steps.

This spate of murders of Black people by police coupled with a growing awareness of the racial disparities made more glaring by the Covid-19 global pandemic, inspired an unprecedented societal reckoning with racial violence and systemic racism more broadly, leading consequently to the largest ever majority of Americans—56% of registered voters—to consider America to be a racist nation (Siddiqui, 2020). The responses to these public examples of racism were varied. Huge numbers of people took to the streets to demand racial justice, constituting perhaps the largest protests in U.S. history (Buchanan et al., 2020). Many joined book clubs to take antiracist instruction from popular authors making Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be An Antiracist* and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* best sellers. Academic institutions grappled with what to do with buildings named after problematic historical figures and there have been public reckonings about racist incidents that have surfaced as people recall their own schooling experiences. Terms like white privilege, white fragility, abolition, white supremacy, and antiracism have become common fixtures in public discourse, and ideas like defunding the police moved from

figments of radical imagination to potentially implementable policies. An August 2020 Education Week survey of 800 teachers and educational leaders found that 81% of teachers identified as antiracist, a plurality of whom described antiracism as including “multiple perspectives and treat[ing] everyone fairly” and defined anti-racist curriculum (53%) as “curriculum promoting diversity and equality.” Still, because descriptors like “treating everyone fairly,” and “promoting equality” can be interpreted in several ways— as either promoting an inclusive curriculum or as a justification of the status quo— teachers’ views and commitments to antiracism are less than clear. Additionally, history teachers more broadly have been found to “avoid or minimize conversations about race for fear that they will trigger “racialized conflict” (Riesman, Enumah, & Jay, 2020).

Yet, as is the case with most large social movements, by summer and fall of 2021, as I began data collection, a variety of right-wing actors had mounted a rabid countermovement across the public domain including running for school board positions (Lambert, 2022), ridding schools of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Sawchuk, 2021), and passing legislation limiting teachers’ abilities to teach about systemic racism (Ray & Gibbons, 2021), topics related to LGBTQ+ (Diaz, 2022), among many other issues suddenly deemed “divisive” (Pendharker, 2022). This racist countermovement’s effort to censor curricular content about race/ism coincided with their inciting of an insurrection of the nation’s capital on January 6, 2021. Despite the differences in aims, methods, and outcomes, these two strands are connected in their shared attachments to white nationalism. And so, while I had set out to understand the

teachers' understandings of race, racism, and related concepts, motivated by the permeation of antiracist discourse throughout popular culture and in teachers' understandings of themselves and their purposes, the additional backdrop of nationwide anti "critical race theory" (CRT) movements also shaped the backdrop in which this study was conducted.

The Power of History Education- Situating Myself in This Study

My own experience learning and teaching history also informed my interest in studying the ways that history teaching and learning mediates sociopolitical beliefs and racial ideologies. I grew up in an affluent, largely white suburb in a conservative-skewing enclave in the liberal Bay Area. While my parents were progressive former pseudo-hippie intellectuals whose political bent diverged from many of the people around whom I was raised, the culture of whiteness permeated my environment, particularly in my formal education. Racial slurs were commonplace; "Jew" was frequently invoked by my friends and foes alike and I did my best not to take it personally; kids dressed in blackface for Halloween and the f-word and "that's so gay" were common parlance. On some level, everyone knew that these behaviors were unacceptable, but it was also a space where consequences rarely existed for those most befitting of the white hegemonic norms, and so, those whose identities lay outside those confines did their best to hide, glide by, or contort themselves to fit within the parameters of normal. Beyond these interpersonal expressions of bigotry, there was very little grappling with the ways our community was shaped and built upon systemic racism and white supremacy, which was especially notable given the

fact that our town continues to have racial covenants on the books (though no longer enforced) (Kendall, 2019).

I also fell in love with learning history during my 10th grade AP European History class, where I learned how to form arguments, distill evidence, and write essays quickly. It was in this class that I was first introduced to ideas of class struggle, capitalism, and to some extent, American imperialism amidst the backdrop of the 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror. Yet, as I entered college and encountered non-white centered historical and sociological course content, I began to realize the depths of my lack of understanding around pretty much any historical phenomenon that captured the fraught nature of race/racism in the United States. While I could talk at length about the invention of the printing press and the Protestant Reformation, I knew very little about the entrenchment of enslavement post-Civil War via the Black Codes, the use of US state entities like the FBI to destroy the Black Panthers via programs like COINTELPRO which culminated in actual assassinations of American citizens like Fred Hampton Jr., and had absolutely no knowledge of the ways that race had been actively constructed and reconstructed in service of white supremacy. I took the naturalness of race as given and though I understood that there were certain words never to be used and that everyone should be treated equally, I see now the ways in which a hegemonic white history/social studies had been wielded to particular effect on me, eliding the vast array of histories within which white people may feel historically implicated, instead protecting a sense of distance, comfort, and the fallacy of a neutral, “objective” history.

Motivated to fill the gaps in my historical knowledge and correct the ways I had been miseducated (Woodson, 1933), I majored in Africana Studies. I then decided to become a history teacher, believing it to be a powerful force through which one can come to situate themselves within the wider sociopolitical conditions, for how can you understand yourself if you cannot understand the context in which you sit? Still, despite these efforts, as a teacher of largely Black and Latine students in San Francisco, I constantly found myself questioning the ways in which the histories I taught continued to purvey a Eurocentric national and global narrative focused on colonialism largely silent on the implicit and explicit violence of its structures that continued to center the actions and power of the perpetrators of violence rather than the resistance of nonwhite peoples. While I was aware of this dynamic while teaching, I was unsure the best way to interrupt it and realize a critical world history curriculum representative of my students' lives, yet non-essentialist; inquiry based yet non-dogmatic and/or prescriptive (e.g., not telling my students what to think); and did not only focus on oppression or constantly position people of color as victims.

These interests are crystalized in this dissertation project which sought to both uncover what white teachers believe to be true about race and racism, the ways in which these ideas manifest in their descriptions of how and what they teach, and the teaching practices that they use that have the power to transform and/or protect the sociopolitical contexts of their schools and communities. While there is a dearth of research connecting the history students learn in school to their ideological development, I argue that history teaching (and history teachers) may serve as a

bridge between the classroom and society— a way in which racial ideologies writ large are protected or punctured— and the goal of the dissertation is to explore how that ideological transmission might occur.

Chapters Overview

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two reviews the relevant literature related to race, racism, and whiteness in teacher education and social studies/history education research. It also contains my theoretical framework and an initial orientation into guiding concepts including Stuart Hall's work on race as a floating signifier and ideology articulation, as well as racecraft, and history teaching as a racial project. Chapter three outlines my methodology, my study design, my participants, and my analytic approach to my data. Chapters four through seven present the findings. Each findings chapter is structured similarly, beginning with an elaboration on different aspects of the theoretical frame, using the theory to make sense of the data and answer different research questions. At times, I synthesize across the entire data set to make sense of different teachers' explanations/ approaches. In other places, I highlight examples from one or two teachers, conducting a more fine-grained analysis focusing on the discursive elements of their interviews, to further deconstruct their racial ideologies on a linguistic level or to illustrate a phenomenon that I noticed amongst multiple cases. I weave theoretical discussions throughout each chapter and end with a discussion/synthesis of findings.

Chapter four provides an overview of the qualitative data in the study, using Fields & Fields' (2014) theory of racecraft to explore the racial ideologies of history

teachers and the ways in which these ideas informed their descriptions of how they teach history. Chapter five homes in on contradictory racial stances, at times simultaneously, drawing on Philip's (2011) interpretation of Hall's (1996) definition of ideology to unpack how two teachers (Ronald and Elizabeth) embody what Philip calls "ideologies in pieces." Chapter six again zooms out to synthesize across the qualitative data set, taking on the questions of sociopolitical contexts amidst anti-"CRT" movements and uses Hall's (1986) theory of articulation and Gutiérrez's (2015) work on creative insubordination to understand how teachers are negotiating the turbulence of the political moment. Chapter seven also synthesizes data across the data set, addressing the gaps between disciplinary and critical approaches to teaching history/social studies (Jay, 2022) to reveal how teachers are employing history-specific disciplinary antiracism. Finally, in chapter eight, I conclude with a discussion of implications, connect findings back to the literature, and consider future research directions.

A note on language: although the American Psychological Association guidelines recommend the capitalization of both White/Black, in this dissertation study I borrowed from Matias et al. (2014) and chose not to capitalize white, in any form, unless appearing within a citation, at the beginning of a sentence, or when directly referencing a particular theory that capitalizes White. They made this choice as an attempt to challenge the supremacy of whiteness and the falseness of racial categories writ large and I follow their lead throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Frame

In this chapter, I review the literature on teaching and learning about race and racism in history/social studies, highlighting studies exploring the form and function of race, racism, and whiteness in social studies standards, curricular materials, and within teaching and learning. I follow with a review of literature based in whiteness studies, focusing particularly through the lens of teacher education, noting the different threads of racial sense-making drawn upon by primarily white teachers. Next, I summarize the gaps that surfaced in reviewing these literatures and follow by describing the theoretical touchstones for this dissertation: race as a floating signifier, racecraft, history teaching as a racial project, and ideology articulation. While these theories have different and sometimes competing genealogies and/or foundations, they all maintain fidelity to an understanding of racial ideologies as sociohistorically determined and I apply each concept, at times in tandem with other theories, in order to best illuminate the various threads of racial ideologies emergent from the data.

Literature Review

Teaching and Learning About Race and Racism in History/Social Studies

I begin this section by examining the presence, absences, and overarching depictions of race and related concepts present in curriculum, textbooks, standards, and other “official” materials related to teaching. Next, I describe research about teaching and learning about race etc. using the King & Chandler’s (2016) framing of *non-racism* vs. *anti-racism* to understand various approaches. I then explore two

potential frameworks for developing racial consciousness amongst history/social studies teachers: racial literacy and racial pedagogical content knowledge (RPCK) and describe the omnipresence of Critical Race Theory in social studies research, describing some of the pitfalls identified by Busey et al. (2022), which leads into an exploration of whiteness studies to further illuminate the landscape of teaching and learning about race in social studies education and research.

A substantial amount of research has examined and problematized various social studies curriculum, textbooks, and state standards, finding that despite the removal of overt racist imagery of the past (Crocco, 2004), these materials continue to reify a white-centered view of history where people of color are subjugated to the margins or generally absent from the broader historical narrative. For example, Woodson (2016; 2017) and Aldridge (2006) found that textbook accounts of the civil rights movement included few African American individuals and that those who were recognized were portrayed as messianic, with little reference to the collectivities mobilized for change, thereby obscuring more complex, multi-faceted, and anti-essentialist constructions of the people and communities that composed these social movements. In effect, these depictions propagated otherness and denied the sociocultural agency of entire groups of people (King, 2014a). Other research has shown how textbooks downplay the institutional arrangements and rely on superficial descriptions of enslavement and racism (Brown & Brown, 2010a; 2010b; Journell, 2008; Anderson & Metzger).

Studies also reported similar findings in terms of other minoritized American groups. Shear et al. (2015) found that Indigenous peoples were mostly absent in

history/social studies frameworks across all 50 states, and that when present, were largely limited to pre-twentieth century content, reifying a narrative of Native Americans as vanquished people from bygone civilizations, rather than a surviving group of Americans. Likewise, Heilig et al. (2012) found that the increased representation within Texas' state standards was actually an "illusion of inclusion" where people of color were both mentioned yet subtly marginalized in their depictions. Calderón (2008; 2014) highlighted the ways that textbooks protect white settler nationalism and western metaphysics and Keenan (2019a) revealed how California's state standards' position missionaries as victims and Indigenous peoples as perpetrators of colonial-era violence. Each of these studies affirm the presence of what Chandler & Branscome (2015) termed 'White Social Studies' which centers white peoples, elides the study of systemic racism, and reifies white common sense (An, 2020). With regard to this dissertation, this research literature suggests that racialized silences within official curriculum work to protect a historical narrative of liberal progress that centers whiteness and downplays the unjust aspects of US history through various discursive sleights of hand (Loewen, 2010).

Studies examining how race and racism are taught in social studies classrooms capture the lack of ease with which mostly white teachers attempt to incorporate topics of race and racism in their classroom—especially with white students— even when teachers make efforts to include more diverse historical content. For example, Chikkatur (2013) conducted ethnographic research on the teaching of secondary African American history course finding that in their attempt to "sell" the course, the

district drew upon universalizing narratives that emphasized the “themes of culture and the universal (“human”) relevance,” and downplayed issues of “race” for fear of upsetting parents (p. 531). She also found that the teacher’s own discomfort with teaching about race and strict compliance with course standards constricted her abilities to effectively center teaching and learning about racism specifically.

Santiago (2016) examined efforts to insert Mexican American history into a unit on the civil rights movement in a middle school classroom through the teaching of the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. She found that attempts to cast *Mendez* as a direct antecedent to the *Brown v. Board* decision ultimately obscured the actual circumstances of the *Mendez* case and prevented further interrogation of the unique racial status of Mexican-Americans at the time. Santiago’s (2016) study is supported by Wills’ (2001) finding that historical narratives aiming to include diversity often fail to incorporate the interactions between white and non-white groups. As a result, power relations and the dynamics that characterize struggles against injustice remained invisible to students. In fact, Wills (2001) argued that students’ understandings of racism tended to be psychological rather than structural in orientation, limited to individual feelings of racism rather than attending to more complex structural arrangements. Subsequent research by Wills (2019) found that across three U.S. history classrooms, teachers tended to individualize their teaching about racism during the Civil Rights Movement, equating racism with individual prejudice rather than as functioning through institutions, systems, and structures. These findings demonstrate both the structural and individual impediments to

effectively teaching about racism.

Other studies demonstrate race-evasive approaches articulated by teachers in their approaches to teaching about race and racism. Washington & Humphries (2011), for example, documented the “sensemaking” practices of Emma, a high school history teacher in a predominantly white and economically underserved school as she encountered controversial topics in her classroom—generally related to race. Emma found that she did not know how to respond to various racial issues she considered “closed” settled historical debates (like slavery and Jim Crow laws) that her students considered “open” (such as interracial marriage and whether women should be sterilized), finding that valuing the “openness” of problematic views ended up legitimizing the topics in question. Wetzel and Rogers’s (2015) case study found that despite the teacher’s increased awareness of racism and whiteness, her attempts to enact racial literacy with her students ended up reifying ideations of race as biological because of her own lack of fluency with the notion of race as socially constructed. Similarly, Parkhouse (2018) recounted how teachers’ efforts to engage critical pedagogy to demystify systemic oppression sometimes failed to engage students in structural analyses and instead relied on individualistic explanations of racism. Finally, Chandler (2009) found that two white male teachers in Alabama engaged in “raceless pedagogies,” expressing fear of talking about racism and depicting race as biological and individually centered, reflecting an overarching historical narrative of liberal, incremental (racial) progress.

Each of the studies described demonstrates King & Chandler’s (2016) *non-*

racism, wherein teachers' efforts failed to interrupt hegemonic understandings of race and racism. By focusing solely on individual enactments, rather than structural explanations of how categories of race have been used to justify particular power arrangements, these teachers perpetuated bio-racial explanations of race and individualized understandings of racism for their students.

Anti-Racism in the Social Studies

In contrast to *non-racism*, King & Chandler (2016) described *anti-racism* as the “active rejection of the institutional and structural aspects of race and racism and explains how racism is manifested in various spaces, making the social construct of race visible” (p. 4). Studies representative of this approach include Hawkman (2019) who described how a teacher drew on his racial biography and personal experiences of racism to inform his racial pedagogical decision making and to comment on hegemonic history curriculum and effectively forge relationships with his students. In a similar vein, Martell (2013, 2018) conducted both self-study of his own development as a culturally relevant pedagogue, and case study research on three culturally relevant teachers demonstrating the positive benefits to students of color regardless of the different approaches taken by each teacher. Parkhouse & Massaro (2018) highlighted the importance of explicit race dialogue in course content, particularly for students of color. Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson (2011) studied how one teacher's use of culturally relevant pedagogy led to students' increasingly complex understandings of race and racism and the collective agency of African Americans and Native Americans in a classroom dominated by students of color over

the course of the school year. Finally, Epstein and Gist (2013) showed how teachers used racial literacy and culturally relevant pedagogies to challenge their students' simplistic understandings of race and racialization.

These studies affirm the positive effects of explicit dialogue about race and racism and demonstrate the possibilities of increasing inclusion in terms of historical narratives that go beyond existing hegemonic narratives that center Eurocentric notions of racial progress. The studies described above led to students' development of more structural understandings of racism and the teachers described in the research illustrated the importance of ideological willingness and proper preparation to engage with race-related subject matters. Notably, nearly every study that captured successful teachers' *anti-racist* enactments of culturally relevant pedagogies took place in "diverse" schools with predominantly students of color and teachers from a range of racial backgrounds (Martell, 2013; 2018; Parkhouse & Massaro, 2018; Hawkman, 2019; Epstein et al., 2011; Epstein & Gist, 2013). In contrast, the studies illustrative of *non-racist* practices primarily took place with mostly white teachers and/or in predominantly white classrooms (with the exception of Santiago, 2016 and Wetzel & Rogers, 2015). This dichotomy raises questions about the differential deployment of race-related knowledge for students of color versus white students, particularly in terms of what centering race and racism in social studies classrooms populated by mostly white students and teachers in pursuit of culturally relevant pedagogy and the dismantling of white supremacy might look like.

Racial Literacy & Racial Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Racial literacy (Twine, 2004; Guinier, 2004) and racial-pedagogical content knowledge (RPCK) (Chandler & Brandscombe, 2015) are two frameworks that can interrupt white teachers' discomfort with teaching about race and racism and whiteness more broadly. Racial literacy, a conceptual framework intended to facilitate more complex understandings of race as "psychological, interpersonal, and structural" (Guinier, 2004, p. 114-115) has carried favor across scholarly areas within a variety of contexts, especially education as a tool to enhance teachers' and students' racial knowledge" (King, 2018, Sealey-Ruiz et al, 2015, Skerrett, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2008). Guinier (2004) argued that understanding complex racial histories requires a new racial literacy that ensures the capacity to "decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic" (p. 100).

Within the realm of teacher education, many scholars have argued that white pre-service teachers lack the necessary racial literacy required for teaching a diverse set of students (King, 2018, Cochran-Smith, 2000; Milner, 2003; Sleeter, 2001; Kohli, Nevárez, & Arteaga, 2018). To bolster the racial literacy of teachers and students, Flynn, Worden, & Rolón-Dow (2018) suggested acknowledging the challenges of talking about race in order to alleviate "racial stress" (Stevenson, 2014) and attempting to move teacher candidates from a place of guilt for past wrongs to responsibility (Utt, 2016; Flynn, Lensmire, & Lewis, 2009). They distinguished between whiteness and white people, framing individual's interpellations within

systemic whiteness as choice in hopes of spurring candidates toward action. They also encouraged teachers to develop “an understanding of systemic forces, or the ways that racism is embedded in social and political institutions such as schools, the justice system, health care, and the government” (p. 244). Additionally, King (2016) argued that social studies offers many affordances for preparing racially literate students who can engage in history related questions like who has been allowed to be fully human, who is granted full citizenship and why, etc. (Duncan, 2021). He argued that “racially literate people can discern how racism, both subtle and overt, influences the way we read the world and identify racist structures, examine and critique racial hierarchies, and give voice to the experiences of people of color” (King, 2016, p. 2).

Similar to racial literacy and specific to social studies contexts, Chandler (2015) put forth Racial Pedagogical Content Knowledge (RPCK) as a potential remedy for white teachers’ lack of ease with topics related to race and racism (Busey et al., 2022, p. 17). He called on teachers and teacher educators to have and teach “content knowledge (in the social science disciplines), pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), and a working *racial* knowledge of how race operates within social science, from CRT perspectives” (p. 5). According to Chandler (2015), a core point of emphasis in RPCK is the subjective nature of knowledge production in acknowledgement that “knowledges” have their own “racialized histories” (p. 6). Despite its explicit focus on race, King & Chandler’s (2016) portrait of RPCK leaves the role of whiteness as co-constituted with race under-theorized. In sum, the bulk of studies on racial literacy acknowledge the challenges of imparting teacher candidates

with a structural analysis of race (Crowley & Smith, 2015), but few elaborate on what this learning process actually looks like (King, 2014b; Hawkman, 2017; Buchanan, 2016).

Critical Race Theory in Social Studies Education Research

Busey, Duncan, and Dowie-Chin's (2022) review of literature on Critical Race Theory in social studies education research over the past 15 years found that although CRT has featured prominently in recent years, even reaching "theoretical stardom," (p. 4), they worried that its overuse, lack of specificity, and a lack of principled commitments to the entirety of its tenets may dilute "its criticality via unproblematized hyper production and lack of attention to its foundations" (p. 12). They found a dearth of research that centers the voices of people of color, a lack of emphasis on the materiality of racism, and that "the social construction of race was not centered as a key tenet of CRT in any of the research studies we analyzed" (Busey et al., 2022, p. 17). In response, they encouraged scholars to take on the material outcomes of racism pertaining to the "relationship between state institutions like the courts and schools," and to "account for how the law constructed racial groups in the first place," pushing beyond focusing solely on the presence/absence of and/or depictions of groups of color, towards showcasing "how these constructions continue to reproduce and further enshrine racial subordination as the status quo" (p. 26). In sum, Busey et al., (2022) made the case that the constructed-ness of race and its historical and contemporary materiality have gotten short shrift in social studies education research, which effectively protects naturalized, permanent ideas of race

and racial groups. They learned that “the concept of ‘race’ in critical race theory is poorly defined as racial groups are assumed,” echoing a point made by various other CRT scholars in both educational and legal disciplines (p. 17).

Busey et al., (2022) also found that a majority of studies using CRT in social studies education involved the ideological racial sense-making of white teachers (p. 18), which is especially noteworthy because despite focusing on white populations of students and teachers, in both the *anti-racist* and *non-racist* camps of literature outlined above, whiteness as an organizing concept went mostly unmentioned. As Matias & Mackey (2016) pointed out, while these approaches “provide frameworks on how to engage in racially-just teaching, the inclusion of pedagogies specific to critical whiteness studies have yet to be articulated” (p. 32). “Focusing solely on racism,” Hawkman (2017) warned, “allows whites to fail to see their positionality within the system of oppression” (p. 33). Given this learning, in the next section, I provide an overview of whiteness studies, highlight some key findings about white deflective patterns engaged by teachers when learning about and/or teaching about whiteness, race, and/or racism, and point to the missing accounting of whiteness in social studies education research despite the prominent focus on white teachers.

Whiteness Studies

Whiteness studies, or Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) as it has also been called, asks questions about what it means to be white, explicitly locating the role of white supremacy in creating racial hierarchies. Rooted in the work of Black scholars like James Baldwin and DuBois (1904/1989), whiteness studies as a field emerged as

a “tributary” of race studies in the 1980s in response to most race-based analyses in education being focused on the experiences of communities of color, which critics argued left the role of whiteness un-excavated and, therefore, protected (Leonardo, 2013). Many scholars mark the beginning of CWS with Peggy McIntosh (1988) who used the metaphor of an invisible knapsack to reflect on the privileges afforded to her as a white person. This work highlighted the range of ways that whiteness functions in the service of white people—from the mundane (being able to buy band-aids that match her skin tone) to the structural (being able to protect her children most of the time). McIntosh’s essay sparked what is now known as the second wave of whiteness scholarship largely focused on explorations of white privilege (McIntosh, 1988; Wise, 2008; Gorski, 2012), the history of whiteness (Roediger, 1991; Lipsitz, 1998), and white racial sense-making (Frankenberg, 1993).

For example, drawing upon Du Bois’s (1935) idea of “public and psychological wages” proffered by whiteness, Roediger (1991) traced the historical construction of whiteness in the United States as it recruited different ethnic populations into its ranks as part of a capitalist tactic intended to divide working people across racial lines. From this perspective, whiteness offered a psychological cover that elevated the status of working-class whites at the bottom of the social ladder. Roediger’s work inspired additional threads of research related to intersections of race and class and raised questions about whom white privilege benefits and in what ways (Allen, 2009; Newitz & Wray, 1997).

Considering whiteness as comprised of “ideologies, attitudes, and actions of

racism in practice,” Chubbuck (2004) contended that whiteness theory can move beyond narrow definitions of whiteness as simply being about white people’s racist thoughts about people of color, and towards an institutional analysis of how white privilege is conveyed systematically (p. 303). Mills (1997) pushed this definition beyond the unit of the individual and towards systemic understandings, arguing that whiteness constitutes a set of power relations. Fine (1997) argued that whiteness theory shifts the focus from racism *against* people of color to racism *for* the benefit of white people. Rather than merely re-centering whiteness by focusing on white people and thus relegating people of color to the margins once again, whiteness studies represents a shift towards excavating the power relations stemming from whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Predicated on the notion that racism is a white problem rather than a mysterious, unmarked agent, whiteness studies strives to make whiteness accountable for the racial oppression enacted in its stead.

White Ignorances/Ignor-ances

A central aim of whiteness studies research traces white peoples’ deflective patterns when confronted with race-related content (Leonardo, 2009). These studies embody what Mills (2007) described as white ignorance e.g., “an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly-- not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge” (p. 13). Mills recounted a “white refusal” to acknowledge the full extent to which they benefit from structural arrangements (2007, p. 28), constituting what Leonardo (2009) described as a myth. For example,

Frankenberg (1993) detailed how white women wrestle with knowledge of their whiteness finding that many exhibited “essentialist,” “power evasive,” and “race-cognizant” discursive practices, noting the extensive rhetorical moves taken up by white people to avoid having to think about their own implication within whiteness. Likewise, Myers (2003) examined “racetalk” wherein white people casually reproduce white supremacy in their private conversations with other white people through “the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols” (p. 129). In explaining the active processes of ignorance, DiAngelo (2006) reasoned that “most Whites have not been trained to think complexly about racism, and because it benefits White dominance not to do so, they have a very limited understanding of racism” (p. 217). She continued, “the vast majority of whites are racially *illiterate*” meaning that they are “only able to articulate the most predictable, superficial, and distorted understandings of race” (2012, p. 4). This is, in large part, because “most white people have never been given direct or complex information about racism before, and often cannot consciously recognize, understand, or articulate much about it” (p. 4). Banks (1996) elaborated on the lack of opportunities to engage with racism, asserting that “students who are born and socialized within the mainstream culture of a society rarely have an opportunity to identify, question, and challenge their cultural assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives...” (p. 80). Another way to view this monocultural thinking is through what Cabrera (invoking Feagin) (2016) described as the “White Racial Frame,” wherein “a particular frame structures the thinking process and shapes what people see, or do not see...this means that frequently White people

receive racial information, yet they process it in non-racial terms” (p. 23).

Each of these examples demonstrate the active and inactive ways in which white ignorance is perpetuated—highlighting what Leonardo & Zembylas (2013) call “technologies,” that occur when individuals are confronted with their white positionality and the unconscious inculcation determined by socially formed language practices. According to Bonilla-Silva (2003), a result of this illiteracy is that white people’s discussions/ comprehensions of race are incoherent and “almost incomprehensible” (p.68), leading to a sense of split or double consciousness (Alcoff, 1998) that limits “intellectual, psychic and emotional growth” (DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5). This type of stunted analysis on the part of white people allows for the perpetuation of a white supremacist system where even when race is discussed, whiteness goes unseen, and explanatory factors for racial segregation and injustice remain unperturbed.

White Deflections in Teacher Education

Within the discipline of education, studies of whiteness largely confirm broader findings about white people’s patterns of deflection when it comes to discussing race, racism, and whiteness. Sleeter (1993) found that white teachers either engaged in silence about race and/or offered alternative identity markers, such as ethnicity, to avoid engaging directly with racism (p. 167). Drawing upon ethnicity theory, the white teachers in her study tended to liken the immigration experiences of European-Americans’ gaining of power and privilege over time to those of Black people and other non-white groups, which enabled them to buy into narratives of meritocracy and

individualism, and thus maintain fidelity to the American dream. This precluded deeper examinations of racism, enslavement, colonialism, and white supremacy responsible for the differential experiences of non-white people of color. Picower's (2009) study showed how white female pre-service teachers resisted discussions of race and white complicity and instead relied on excuses, such as the fact that they were Jewish and/or dated people of color as alibis (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) in order to prove they were not racist. Gay and Kirkland (2003) identified maneuvers that pre-service teachers engaged in to avoid discussing race, citing strategies such as silence, diversion (like shifting the conversation to issues of class or gender), guilt, and benevolent liberalism, which the authors argued constituted tactics of active obfuscation rather than sheer lack of knowledge. Haviland (2008) described white teacher candidates' discussions of race as lacking systemic analysis, characterized by attempts to appear "good" in conversations about race, while also engaging in practices like changing the topic, remaining silent, and/or avoiding certain words (p. 47).

Other scholars emphasize the active process of obfuscation that protects white supremacy asserting that white teachers are well-aware of their whiteness and actively seek to protect it. In one example, Garrett & Segall (2013) expressed frustration at pre-service teachers' feigned "lack of knowledge...about multiculturalism, race, and diversity," asserting that "the underlying assumption of ignorance as a simple lack of knowledge that can be overcome is misleading" (p. 296). Citing Morrison (1992), they contended that it takes hard work to ignore the

legacy of enslavement, colonization, and terror wrought in the name of territorial expansion (Garrett & Segall, 2013, p. 300). That said, people's awareness of their position within racial hierarchies does not necessarily translate into a complex understanding of the structural system that created the race labels in the first place. Much of this research considers the ways in which white teachers' lack of systemic understandings of race and racism and/or their personal resistance to engaging in such topics affect their perceptions of and treatment of students of color, imagining and focusing on their relationship with students as a racialized "other" (Daniels, 2018 p. 18).

Whiteness in History/ Social Studies

Though research on race and racism in the social studies has grown steadily over the years, despite Chandler & Branscombe's (2015) indictment of the pervasiveness of "White Social Studies," whiteness as a concept of focus in social studies education research and curricular topic in social studies courses has been slower to be taken up (Hawkman, 2020), although this appears to be changing (see, for example, the 2021 edited volume on articulating whiteness in social studies edited by Hawkman & Shear). Within this developing area of research, studies have mostly focused on personal narrative and self-reflection as vehicles for examining whiteness, largely among pre-service teachers.

For example, Crowley & Smith (2015) grappled with the pedagogical blockages that hindered critical conversations about whiteness, finding that pre-service teachers had difficulty understanding the structures of white supremacy, integrating their

personal experiences with whiteness, and recognizing structural racism as occurring in their classrooms, through their teaching, and in educational contexts. Hawkman (2022) studied the racial micro-defense patterns of white pre-service teachers which included viewing race work as limited to people of color rather than inclusive of whiteness; distancing themselves from assumptions of white supremacy via geography (e.g., assuming that only people in the South are racist); seeking instant solutions or checklists to become antiracist; and complaining that learning about antiracism hindered their learning to be effective social studies practitioners. Hawkman (2020) found that even in her explicit attempts to incorporate antiracism into her social studies methods course, teacher candidates vacillated between racist and antiracist stances at different points in the course, and through various interventions and whiteness remained pervasive. Finally, Crowley (2016) dislodged homogenous assumptions about white teachers' racial sense making; distinguishing between the transgressive White racial knowledge and negotiated White racial knowledge that white pre-service teachers deployed to protect themselves from complicity in racism (p. 1016). He also found that personal narratives about white privilege had limited effects in moving teachers towards systemic understandings of race and racism.

These findings line up with larger research threads in teacher education around the challenges of deeply engaging teachers in topics related to race, racism, and whiteness. In particular, scholars have noted the limitations of white privilege pedagogy (WPP)—the usage of the concept of 'white privilege' to trigger

introspection about the structural benefits that accompany being white—which critics fear do little beyond forcing a confessional stance, elaborating that “focusing on the individual rather than the structural obscures the social, economic, and political constructions of whiteness” (Lensmire et al., 2013, p. 421). Leonardo (2004) worried that WPP may “enable white people to resist learning more about white racism and ‘perpetuate a legacy of white refusal to engage racial domination or acts of terror towards people of color’” (p. 150). Crowley & Smith (2015), Hawkman (2020) and others suggest that prolonged exposure to systematic, structural interpretations of race and racism is needed to develop white preservice teachers.

Informing this project

The research literature and the gaps that emerged in its review informed the stance and commitments that informed this dissertation study. For one, rather than focusing on personal narratives and self-reflection regarding racial structures exclusively, I expand my research on teachers’ racial ideologies beyond the level of personal in order to get a sense of teachers’ historical and systemic understandings of race, racism, and whiteness. Additionally, the research literature rarely digs into the historical content knowledge that white teachers deploy when teaching history, which is a topic that I explore in depth in examining the interstices between teachers’ white racial knowledge and their historical content knowledge about race. Furthermore, the bulk of the literature focuses on pre-service teachers, some of whom are encountering critical content about race, racism, and whiteness for the first time. By contrast, this dissertation explores a very different population of history teachers— those who are

veterans in their classrooms— who have been selected by their states as models of excellence in their field. Thus, in response to the identity-based foci of previous studies, this dissertation homes in on the systemic, structural, and historical knowledge that white teachers narrate in their understandings of race and related concepts, and as related to their content and pedagogy when teaching social studies.

Finally, one of the key findings from reviewing the literature on race and racism in social studies is that there continues to be a lack of engagement with what history teachers (and by proxy, their students) understand race to *be* (Leonardo, 2013) and, how they understand and teach about racism (whether systemically, individually, or something else entirely). Moreover, as noted by Busey et al., (2022), almost no studies engage with the social constructed-ness of race. These findings inform my conceptual frame which leans on Hall's (1996) theorizing of race as a floating signifier and Fields and Fields' (2014) work on racecraft to further home in on teachers' understandings of race writ large. I follow with a framing of history teaching as a racial project (Omi & Winant) and use Hall's (1986) theory of articulation to make sense of teachers' acts of creative insubordination (Gutiérrez, 2015; 2016) when faced with external threats to their content production.

Theoretical Frame

As referenced earlier in this chapter, while the field of social studies education has increasingly engaged race as a lens of study, there remains a lack of consensus and a failure to define race in these research efforts. Likewise, the field has rarely engaged the idea of race as a social construction. As result, like other social science

disciplines, this lack of engagement has ended up protecting race as a concept imbued with realness, often understood as a biological fact, despite its constructed-ness. Given this, theorizations of race as a floating signifier, racecraft, history teaching as a racial project, and ideology articulation are core theoretical pillars of this dissertation study— dialectically informing both my conception of the project and my data analysis. In the space below, I briefly describe each of these theoretical framings which I expand upon in chapters 4-7 wherein I apply these concepts to understand the research findings in this study.

Race as a Floating Signifier

Rather than a freestanding or fixed identity marker, Stuart Hall theorized race as a “floating signifier,” that takes on different meanings depending on time, place, actors, and activities. He described it as a “discursive construct...a sliding signifier” that organizes “great classificatory systems of difference which operate in human societies” (Hall, Gilroy, & Wilson, 2021, p. 359). For Hall, rather than a biological reality, “race works like a language” which he likened to a practice of meaning making. He elaborated:

Those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they establish in other concepts and ideas in a signifying field (p. 362).

Rather than holding essential meaning, for Hall, race is relational, dependent on the classification of human difference, and subject to a “constant process of redefinition and appropriation... a process of being constantly resignified, made to mean

something different in different cultures, in different historical formations, at different moments of time” (Hall et al., 2021, p. 362). In his essay, “Race as a Floating Signifier,” Hall outlines the cultural markers that gave race its meaning in different historical moments, starting with religion and moving towards science with the start of the Enlightenment. While Hall is a foundational thinker in cultural studies and poststructuralism, his work maintains an attachment to Marxist thought and is always connected to socio-historical theories. Thus, although they have different genealogies, Stuart Hall’s work is not entirely discordant with the work of the Fields sisters and in fact, Fields & Fields’s work, described below, further adds specificity to the particular signifiers that have shaped the meaning of race contemporarily given its ties to racial capitalism and enslavement (2014).

Racecraft

Like Hall, Fields & Field’s (2014) theory of racecraft also troubles the realness of race and adds grist to Hall’s discussion of signifiers, herein applied to modern racial ideation in the United States. To begin, as Fields & Fields’ (2014) explained this phenomenon:

The term *race* stands for the conception or the doctrine that nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from the members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank (p. 16).

For Fields & Fields (2014), race itself is at issue— an ideological creation created

to justify structures like enslavement, colonization, and more. They explained that “race” “too often recommends itself as a guiltless word, a neutral term for an empirical fact,” yet it is not (p. 96). Instead, they view race in the “same family as the evil eye,” (p. 100-101) by which they mean that it is a fallacy, a fiction, a hoax, a crime, likening it to witchcraft via adoption of the term racecraft to describe the process by which racism has made race to justify inequality, explaining:

From very early on, Americans wove racist concepts into public language about inequality that made “black” the virtual equivalent of “poor” and “lower class,” thus creating a distinctive idiom that has no parallel in other Western democracies (p. 11)

A belief in “race” is thus, the first principle of racism, an “apparently blameless word” that permits the routinization and habituation of a term and practice “whose essence is not just indecorum but monstrosity” (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 102). They impugned the ever presence of “race” in “titles of an ever-growing number of scholarly books and articles as a euphemism for slavery, disenfranchisement, segregation, lynching, mass murder, and related historical atrocities; or as unintentionally belittling shorthand for ‘persons of African descent and anything pertaining to them’” (p. 100). Even when scholars acknowledge the constructed-ness of race, it is still regularly invoked, “as though it were both a coherent analytical category and a valid empirical datum” (p. 100). This is in part because, as many scholars have argued, although race is socially constructed, racism is materially

experienced and real on a global scale with life and death consequences.

While many scholars have suggested (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1997; Gilroy, 2000) that race, especially whiteness, should be abolished, others, like Omi & Winant (1994), have asserted that these arguments are unrealistic and that there are reasons not to dispense with race altogether, asserting instead that it should be understood as an ever-evolving, sociohistorical process of social structuring containing both hegemonic *and* counter-hegemonic projects. Winant (2000) explicitly critiqued the lack of realism in Fields and others' discussion of abolishing race, arguing that race is too deeply ingrained in the global social reality and impermeable from individuals' identities and experiences of everyday life to be ignored or abolished altogether. He asserted, "U.S. society is so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity" (p. 184). He also warned that too much emphasis on "race as an illusion" can easily descend into colorblind racism, taken up by conservative factions who can then ignore the reality of racism and instead aim to judge individuals by the "content of their character," in effect protecting the existing racial order and ignoring the "continuing significance and changing meaning of race" (p. Winant, 2000, p. 182). Omi & Winant's (1994) racial formation theory holds that racial projects can be competing, asserting that as racial antagonism becomes more complex, political deployment of race can signal both political domination and opposition (Winant, 2000, p. 186). At its worst, Winant (2000) asserts that the "race as illusion" argument is intellectually dishonest (p. 182) and that the move towards "racelessness" that can accompany the "dissolution of the transparent racial identity"

arguments can lead to the “easy elision” of whiteness that “accompanies racial domination” (p. 187). For him, understanding what race does and how it organizes society is key to eliminating inequality. Fields & Fields (2014), however, have taken a different tack, arguing that denaturalizing race inevitably shifts the way that the problem of racism is understood and redressed: “what is needed is not a more varied set of words and categories to represent racism but a politics to uproot it” (p. 109).

In this dissertation, I take seriously Fields & Fields’ theories along with Omi & Winant’s emphasis on the sociohistorical process by which race has changed over time. While Winant (2000) has critiqued Fields’ work explicitly, I do not believe that these theories are actually in direct opposition, and in fact, Winant’s (2000) discussion of racial time, which considers the historical temporality of race, is quite complementary with Fields & Fields (2014) urging of historicizing race, as is their focus on the ideological, constructed-ness of race and the significance of racial categories themselves. For me, Fields & Fields’ and Omi & Winant’s theories respectively provide long-term and short-term goals when it comes to what to do about race, which requires a deep understanding of its constructed-ness and workings to one day do away with its social hierarchy. I rely on the framework of racecraft because it dislodges the ideological status quo that fixes race as a permanent descriptor in order to locate and understand the logics that history teachers employ to make sense of race, both in their lives and in their teaching, especially because research in social studies education has shown how much race is continually reinscribed as biological and/or permanent. By training my lens on the fallacy of race, I

do not ignore the lived, material realities of race as its changed over time, but instead, because this dissertation focuses on ideologies, I aim to ascertain the extent to which teachers rely on naturalized understandings of race and for those who do understand its constructed-ness, to what extent they extend to their definitions and teaching of the systemic and historical elements of racism. Fields and Fields' work offers a constant reminder of the relationship between race and racism, the former providing the justifying logic for white supremacy and entrenched racial hierarchies.

History Teaching as a Racial Project

Despite their theoretical disjunctures with Fields & Fields (2014), I also use Omi & Winant's (1994) framing of racial projects to orient the work of history teaching in facilitating students' comprehensive racial learning, the process through which [people] negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of the various and conflicting messages they receive about race, ultimately forming their own understanding of how race works in society and in their lives" (Winkler, 2012, p. 4). In line with Hall's (2021) theorizing of signifiers as shaping the meaning of race at different moments, Omi & Winant's (1994) theory of racial formation describes the ways in which racial categories are "created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed...a process of historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (p. 55-56). A racial project, they contended, "is simultaneously "*an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines* (original authors' emphasis)" (p. 56). Moreover, racial projects "connect what race

means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning” (p. 56). In this sense, racial projects provide explanatory frameworks that interpret and represent racial dynamics. History is constructed through narratives, which according to Bruner (1990) are stories through which humans substantiate their lives, constructing “a social world that...become[s] hardened into institutional structures that then perpetuate and enforce them” (p. 137). Moreover, as a discipline, histories emerge as products of historians who “cobble together a set of processes, lend them some order, and assert history as an event” (Leonardo, 2016, p. 4). From Leonardo’s (2016) perspective, history is seen as a collection of narratives likened to myths where “myth is less about falsehoods than the stories that bind a social formation and their consequences” (p. 5). Hughey (2012) argued that narratives are key to understanding racial identity formation because they provide a set of shared stories that “link the social world together,” and “provide accounts of how individuals view themselves in relation to others” (p. 5). In turn, these narratives “affect behavior because people often choose actions that are consistent with the meaningful expectations of their racial identities” (p. 5). He explained the ways in which narratives “order the links” about racial categories into a “recognizable story” (p. 5) which upon becoming “widely agreed upon...pattern social interaction in important ways” (p. 5).

Along similar lines, Bonilla-Silva’s (2003/2014) work on colorblindness provides an important link between narrative and racial ideology which he defined as comprised of “common frames, style, and racial stories...” which are “rooted in the

group-based conditions and experiences of the races and are, at the symbolic level, the representations developed by these groups to explain how the world is or ought to be. And because the group life of the various racially defined groups is based on hierarchy and domination, the ruling ideology expresses as “common sense” the interests of the dominant race (p. 10). Bonilla-Silva’s emphasis on stories, and the ways in which they operationalize worldviews expressive of the dominant race, reiterates the ways in which history is a vehicle through which racial ideologies can be/are imparted to students. With these ideas in mind, history teaching, which provides explanations for why things are the way they are, performs powerful work in either preserving or puncturing particular understandings of race and its role in society.

Teachers are curricular gatekeepers (Thornton, 1997) and race and racism are core to (nearly) any historical course of study (Reisman et al., 2020). Given this, the ways in which history teachers represent the past and present role of race and racism likely provides critical information for students about themselves, their social positioning, and the contemporary worlds in which they inhabit, although the research on this question is limited. While postmodernists reject meta narratives and the idea of any single truth, the concept of *master narrative*, viewed as compulsory for group members, is useful in the context of secondary history education. Hammack (2011) described “master narrative” as a “collective storyline,” a story which is so central to the group’s existence and “essence” that it commands identification and integration into the personal narrative” (313). A great deal of research in social studies education

has shown the continued pervasiveness of dominant narratives in social studies textbooks (Calderón, 2008; 2014; Lintner, 2004; Brown & Brown, 2010), state standards (Eargle, 2016; Journell, 2008; Vasquez-Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2011; Shear, Knowles, Soden, & Castro, 2015; Anderson & Metzger, 2011) and curriculum (Loewen, 1995; Au, Brown, and Calderon 2016). Chandler and Branscombe (2015) described the hegemonic versions of history articulated by the aforementioned scholars as White Social Studies (WSS). As Leonardo (2010) pointed out, educators daily teach young people the naturalized status of race, it's "foreverness" (p. 681). Thus, I extrapolate that the historical narratives that history teachers deploy in teaching their students are consequential for students learning about their social station and the past events that have informed this positioning, particularly when it comes to race, constituting a significant racial project experienced by all students matriculating through U.S. schools.

Ideology & Articulation

Taking the prior theorizations of race into account, this project broadly relies on Hall's framing of ideology to make sense of teachers' conceptualizations of race/ism. Unlike interpretations of ideology that are framed in pejorative terms, likened to bad breath or a signal of false thinking from a Marxian perspective (Leonardo, 2004c, p. 250-251), this dissertation approaches ideology from a cultural studies perspective, wherein ideology is akin to worldview or, as Leonardo (2004c) put it, "a necessary framework for consciousness" (p. 251) and an "unavoidable medium of thought that organizes our experience" (p. 252). Reflecting this perspective, Hall (1996) defined

ideology as “the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 26). He contended that “...ideologies do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but in the articulation of different elements into a distinct set or chain of meanings” (Hall, 1995, p. 18). Fields & Fields (2014) similarly affirmed the ways in which ideology functions as the “descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day” (p. 134). Because ideology is made and remade in the daily social practices, organizations, and activities through which individuals constitute their lives, “ideologies are not delusions but real, as real as the social relations for which they stand, and yet despite their realness, “it does not follow that they are scientifically accurate” (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 134). From this perspective, ideology can be either positive—inciting critical thinking and consciousness-raising— or negative, a product of false consciousness or distortions of reality (Leonardo, 2004c). Rather than neutral, views of race are always ideological, inflected with politics and power, implicated in ideological struggle (Leonardo, 2004c, p. 253). Additionally, for Hall et al. (2021) race, and the signification process that imbues it with meaning, is both a habitual practice whereby race, and thus, racial hierarchies, are made and remade through everyday activities.

Hall’s theory of articulation asserts that the reliance and employment of ideologies is socially contingent, ever-changing, and frequently adopted in fragments

rather than uniformly, reflective of the dialogic relationship between structures and individual agency, constituting a type of “play of power” by which competing forces collide, coalesce, at times simultaneously (Slack, 1996, p. 112). Hall (1985) explained:

By the term ‘articulation’, I mean a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not ‘eternal’ but has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged (p. 113-114, footnote 2).

Given this, Hall’s view of ideology is that it is constantly being reconstituted, negotiated, and re-engaged in a Gramscian battle for commonsense. As Clarke (2015) put it, Hall paid attention to the specificity of the political and cultural practices that sustained specific ideological articulations understanding that no discursive meaning came with “a lifetime guarantee” (p. 3). In an interview with Grossberg (1996), Hall explained:

...a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects... the theory of articulation

asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position (p. 142–143).

In Hall's view, ideologies are not necessarily articulated in uniform, totalizing ways and instead, come to take on different meanings, at different times, to different effects by different actors. Drawing on these ideas, Philip (2011) described ideological uptake as occurring 'in pieces,' whereby the teachers in his study drew upon competing naturalized racial axioms (e.g., common sense assumptions about race) to contradictory effect.

Because ideologies can be articulated and re-articulated by actors to acquire new or revised meanings, Hall's theory buttresses this study's focus on teachers' racial ideologies by highlighting the contingent and ever-changing meanings that teachers applied to race and related concepts and also the ways by which they negotiated the competing racial logics characterizing their specific local contexts, which is described in more depth in Chapter 6. Hall's articulation theory highlights the complex discursive negotiations that teachers themselves apply in their racial sense making and in their struggles against dominant forces more broadly.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the empirical and theoretical literature related to race, racism, and whiteness in the fields of teacher education and history/social studies education, revealing that despite increased race-related research, there continues to be a focus on the personal locus of racialized sense-making and that race tends to be taken for granted as a naturalized phenomenon rather than an act of historical and contemporary constitution, enacted and reified anew through daily social practices. It is clear from reviewing this literature that there is space to explore what is meant when “race” is invoked, and that white individuals (teachers included) tend to rely on individualized rather than systemic interpretations of racism, or at least they default to that when under pressure from external forces. Additionally, this research showcases both the ongoing centering of white teachers, white sense-making, and white students, but less addresses what antiracist education or race-conscious instruction looks like for white students. Although this dissertation also emphasizes the racial sense-making of white teachers, the student demographics, school type, community, and regional location offer additional insights into the context that surrounds and informs racial ideologies which adds layers of complexity beyond personal narrative and self-reflections about white privilege.

The theoretical frameworks engaged in this dissertation serve as important reminders for 1. the fallacy and historical constructed-ness of race and the lack of systemic interpretations of and teaching about systemic racism; 2. the important role that history teaching and history teachers play in preserving or disrupting hegemonic

(mis)understandings of race; and 3. the dialogic relationship that exists between individuals and structures in discarding, reaffirming, repeating, and redesigning dominant commonsense. In the next chapter, I describe the methods guiding my study of how award-winning history teachers nationwide narrated race related concepts in general and as related to their teaching.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Study Design

I begin with an overview of the study's broad aims and methodology. Next, I describe the design of my study, including the collection and analysis of the data and a breakdown of the participants. I follow with an explanation of my positionality as a researcher and how my identities and experiences shaped my engagement with this work.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this work:

1. How do white, award-winning history teachers in the United States narrate race, racism, antiracism, and whiteness in their teaching, their curricula, in society, and in their racial identity formation?

2. To what extent and in what ways do teachers' narrations of race and related concepts and stated responsibilities to teaching particular perspectives about race related to the contextual factors (student and school demographics, school administration, community context, state policies and laws, etc.)?
3. How are teachers navigating their particular social contexts to advance their views of what constitutes antiracist teaching?

Methodologies

Qualitative Research

While this study utilizes a mixed methods approach, at its heart, it is a qualitative research project. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) have noted, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (p. 6). This sentiment animated all facets of the project and while I employed descriptive statistical analysis of my quantitative survey results, the bulk of the data were viewed through a qualitative lens whereby I sought to situate how each response fit within the landscape of teachers' overarching responses, attuned to both consistencies and ruptures, which then informed participant selection and analysis of semi-structured interviews that followed. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences, their sense making, and allowed me, as the researcher, to glean insights into their teaching and community contexts,

interpretations about the role of race racism, whiteness, and antiracism, and hear their interpretations of their pedagogy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003)

Symbolic Interactionism

This dissertation is also grounded in symbolic interactionism, which is both a theory and a method and is useful for understanding attitudes, motives, and behaviors, and for understanding how individuals manage their impression of self and others (Carter & Alvarado, 2018, p. 1). As people interact with institutions, schools, people, ideas, and other structures, they make meaning and mutually create symbols, which, in turn, shape individual beliefs and behaviors. According to Blumer (1969), meanings are continually recreated through interpreting processes during interactions with others. These symbols create and maintain society, are tools for socialization, enable communication and cooperation, and “they make possible our ability to pass down knowledge from one generation to another” (Charon, 2010, p. 60).

Therefore, through interaction, “individuals can see their own behavior not only from the point of view of significant others [like their parents] but also in terms of generalized norms, values, and beliefs (Mead as cited in Woods, 1996, p. 34). This points to the ways in which larger structures shape individual meaning-making, along with processes of normalization whereby individuals become socialized. Woods (1996) described this type of dialogism as “appropriate conduct is worked out by an interpretative and interactive process” (p. 34). At the same time, symbolic interactionism does not view individuals as “consumers of knowledge, but [rather] as

constructors of shared meanings in combined exercise with teachers” (Woods, 1996, p. 39).

A central goal of symbolic interactionism is to come to know a “subject’s viewpoint,” generating “knowledge *about* learning processes, about strategies for learning, and about people who are involved with them” (Woods, 1996, p. 39). This type of interaction requires researchers to attempt to “capture the meanings that permeate the culture as understood by the participants” (Woods, 1996, p. 40). In line with this pursuit, this dissertation study foregrounded teachers’ interpretations of symbolic concepts like race, racism, whiteness, and antiracism. In examining how participants interpreted the concepts through surveys and semi-structured interviews, this study attempted to adhere to Woods’ (1996) dictate that researchers sample across time as “the same props may mean different things on different occasions” (p. 45). In addition, symbolic interactionism is an attempt to understand both the “practical consciousness” of participants along with “some of its more hidden supports” (Woods, 1996, p. 60) which speaks to this study’s interest in locating the naturalized racial axioms and ideological bent that populated teachers’ narratives of race-related concepts including within historical narratives and surfacing the moments of rupture or discontinuity whereby ideological consistencies became less clear-cut. Finally, because the transmission of meaning and culture is the work of history teachers, understanding the meanings they assign to concepts like race, racism, and whiteness seems like an important area for exploration, particularly from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Because individuals are socialized through

symbols (like narrative) (Charon, 2010, p. 60), locating the personal and societal narratives of teachers has implications for understanding how commonsense notions of race are transmitted and for identifying how such notions may be disrupted. Central to symbolic interactionism is the role of signs and symbols. Because I consider race to be an ideological symbol, though determinative of individuals' lived realities, in this project I seek to understand the ways teachers use race to fit certain cultural scripts (Goffman, 1959) that shape their self-understandings, their explanations of society, and the ways they recount the past for their students.

Critical Language Studies

Because language is an essential structuring component of narrative, this dissertation study is also methodologically grounded in Critical Language Studies (CLS), which views language not just as a way of “representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 63-64). What sets CLS apart from symbolic interactionism and interpretivist research in general is its explicit focus on the roles of power, ideology, and history in both reflecting and constituting reality and its pursuit of emancipation, enlightenment, and social transformation (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). As Woods (1996) noted, “the most important [symbols] are expressed in language. The internalization of symbols and meaning patterns and the stimulation of thought through language increase the human being’s powers of reflectivity and the ability to see oneself as an object, to make indications towards one’s self, and to act as one might towards others” (Woods, 1996, p. 33).

CLS views language as having determining power and material consequences for individual identity construction and social relationships. As Gee (2014) put it, “Language allows us to be things” (p. 2). He elaborated upon this type of “recognition” where “if you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity)” (Gee, 1999, p. 18). Gee has described this type of recognition as a “Discourse,” (his preferred term to ideology) which are “embedded in a medley of social institutions,” making it impossible to separate individual actors from the Discourses they represent, enact, and of which they are “carriers.” He further explained that Discourses, “through our words and deeds, carry on conversations with each other through history and in doing so, form human history” (Gee, 1999, p. 18). Because language operates in ways that individuals are not often conscious of (Fairclough, 1989), examining the discourse patterns of my participants as they discuss race, racism, whiteness, and antiracism is critical to this project. Moreover, because of whiteness’ tendency to elide location (Leonardo, 2004a) and because --discussions of race are often slippery, CLS provides powerful tools to surface undercurrents that are not easily detectable. In examining the micro-processes of language—in terms of grammar, syntax, social positionings, and the logics upon which interpretations rest— (discussed more in the section on data analysis), CLS illuminates participants’ ideological stances embedded in the narratives they recount about themselves, social structures like race, and through their interpretations of antiracism.

Study Design

In order to pursue questions about white award-winning history teachers' racial ideologies and the imprint on their teaching, this study employed a *transformative explanatory mixed methods* study design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). Within this type of design, one uses quantitative data to identify and purposefully select participants for follow-up qualitative study. It is important to note that while I draw from Creswell's (2014) use of the term "explanatory" to describe the mixed methods informing this study design, the research project itself does not claim to be explanatory and does not make causal links explaining teachers' ideologies characteristic of design-experiment research methods. Instead, the central purpose of this study is descriptive, seeking to "answer questions of what, where, when, and how" (Babbie, 2010, p. 94). Still, using an explanatory mixed methods design gave me insights into the expanse of award-winning teachers' ideological understandings of race and enabled more in-depth analysis of a purposeful sample of award-winning teachers representative of a diverse array of factors. And, because in studying these questions, I was driven by an interest in understanding and halting the reproduction of white supremacist ideologies via history teaching, this study is grounded in a critical and transformative worldview (Creswell, 2014). In the following sections, I describe each phase of data collection along with my rationales for choosing these approaches.

Surveys

In the first stage of data collection, I distributed a short online survey to secondary state finalists for the Gilder Lehrman National History-Teacher-of-the-Year

(GLNHTOY) award. The survey included demographic questions where participants about teachers' racial identities (both self-defined and whether they identified as a white person), their region (Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, Southwest, West, and Department of Defense schools, US territories, and other), teaching context (urban, rural, small town, suburban, other), school type (private, public, charter, other), courses and levels taught, years teaching, and student demographics (predominantly white, predominantly non-white, diverse, and other). Additionally, the survey also included Likert-scale questions which asked participants to identify the extent to which they agree or disagree with different statements about the role of race in U.S. society, its presence in their curricula, and their responsibilities as history teachers. These questions were adapted from validated surveys employed by Knowles & Hawkman (2019) who examined teachers' racial fragility and antiracist self-efficacy, themselves having adapted the work of DiAngelo (2011) and Siwatu (2007). The online survey is available in Appendix One. It is important to note that the Likert responses were intended as blunt indicators of teachers' orientations towards race rather than indicative of their fully fleshed out racial beliefs. These questions were used to identify teachers' commitments at the broadest level to inform participant selection for the interview phase of research, which is expanded upon in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Using the responses from the surveys, I selected a sub-group of teachers to invite to participate in semi-structured interviews whom I selected based on criteria that

strived to represent as diverse a sample as possible. I first limited my sample to respondents who expressed willingness to participate in an interview; described themselves as white; taught secondary social studies content and course levels; and those who were still actively teaching and not retired.

After meeting the aforementioned conditions, I selected my sample striving to achieve as diverse a range of conditions and opinions about race as possible. I examined demographic information like student demographics, region, school type, and community type to obtain a sample of teachers with differential proximities to whiteness. I also considered initial ideological orientation, seeking a range of opinions. While all these factors informed who I reached out to initially, ultimately teachers' responsiveness and follow-through in scheduling the interviews was the predominant factor.

Interviews were scheduled using the website Calendly which enabled participants to sign up for 60-minute time slots. These interviews began in Fall 2021 and concluded in January 2022. They were conducted over Zoom, recorded, and transcribed first using the software program Sonix and then manually corrected by me during Spring 2022. While I had originally intended to conduct between 20 and 25 interviews, I found them so fruitful that I sought to expand my sample size and conduct additional interviews. When I had exhausted my original list of participants who had completed the survey, I decided to reach out to the newly released 2021 finalists of the GLNHTOY award, seeking teachers representative of states who I had

not yet interviewed. By the time I concluded my interview phase of data collection, I had 39 participants in the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to an hour and a half where we discussed a range of questions including how teachers decided to enter the profession, their goals and responsibilities as history teachers, and their views on the role of race in history, in society, and in their own lives. I asked them about curricular applications, asking them to detail single day lessons for me around topics of race, racism, and/or whiteness; how they taught about the events of January 6th, and their views on antiracism and how they understand what antiracist teaching looks like in practice. A full interview protocol is available in Appendix Two.

The Constructed-ness/Performance of Interviews

It is important to note that interviews are not merely a neutral research tool through which to collect information or “data.” As Talmy (2011) reminded, “Data are representations of truths, facts, attitudes, beliefs, mental states, etc.,” and the conducting and interpreting of interviews cannot be disentangled from the person doing the interviewing (e.g., me) (p. 27). For Talmy, data are collaboratively produced and rather than simply “emerging” from findings, themes and interpretations depend on the person doing the interpreting (again, me). The interpretive elements are key to all qualitative research, especially exploratory studies like this one. Asking questions and drawing conclusions about what teachers say in their interviews is an interpretive activity that I am engaging in that includes my theoretical influences, my socio-historically situated position as a researcher, and my

ideological commitments (Talmy, 2011, p. 29). That I am choosing to study race, racism, and teachers' ideations of those concepts is not a neutral activity and I bring with my analysis commitments to racial justice and ideas about what should be done to dismantle whiteness. Likewise, the teachers in the study also sought to represent themselves in particular ways based on their ideological commitments, social positioning, context, etc. These elements informed the information that they shared with me about their views of race, racism, etc., topics which are already considered to be fraught and socially risky, should individuals be found to have said the "wrong" thing. And, these teachers also interpreted me, as the researcher contextually bound ways. Their assumptions about and analysis of my identity, goals, and motives undoubtedly also contributed to what they chose to share with me in their interviews. Because interviews constitute what Talmy (2011) termed as both speech events and social practices, in addition to research tools, the dialogic nature of these interviews must be considered as I present findings from interviews. Additionally, I expand upon the limitations and rationale of relying on self-reporting later in this chapter.

Participants & Rationale

This dissertation drew participants from a publicly available list of teachers named their state's history teacher of the year award by the Gilder Lehrman Institute (GLI), a prominent nonprofit organization dedicated to K-12 history education, with a mission to promote knowledge and understanding of American history. GLI works with teachers in a variety of capacities including hosting summer institutes, creating and distributing curriculum, and by administering year-round professional

development opportunities. Since 2004, the organization has annually awarded the Gilder Lehrman National History Teacher of the Year (GLNHTOY) award to one teacher selected from 53 state finalists from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense schools, and US Territories. According to the Gilder Lehrman program officer, each state typically receives up to 100 nominees for the award and each state's finalist is ultimately selected by a panel of state officials and local departments of education pre-approved by the GLI (personal communication, Jan 4, 2021). Upon receiving each state's nomination, the GLI then convenes a committee of expert educators and educational professionals who select the ultimate GLNHTOY winner. To be considered for the award, teachers must be nominated by a colleague, parent, or student and subsequently put together a portfolio demonstrating their leadership roles, their creativity, and their use of multiple sources with their students. Although the organization permits nominations from both within their pre-existing network and from the public, those who are nominated have usually had some kind of affiliation or contact with GLI in the past, which inevitably impacts and limits the types of teachers who are nominated and selected as finalists and winners.

Of course, the nature of recruiting participants strictly from this group of teachers means that the findings resulting from this study can only reflect this specific group of professionally lauded teachers. My rationale for enlisting participants from this group is that it gave insights into the beliefs and practices of teachers considered by their peers and communities to be experts in the field—those who have taken leadership roles in advancing history education for their schools, districts, and even

their states (one of criteria for selection) and been publicly recognized for these efforts. In addition, Gilder Lehrman's central focus on American history implies that those who are selected have demonstrated what the committee interprets as a commitment to teaching American history, creativity and imagination in the pedagogical practices, and effective use of documents, artifacts, historic sites, oral histories, and other primary sources to engage students with American history (additional selection criteria for the award, according to their rubric). These demonstrated commitments, along with the fact that the teachers have undergone a rigorous vetting process and been selected by fellow educators, historians, educational researchers and policy makers, makes their ideological understandings about race all the more interesting.

This sample of teachers tended to be extremely experienced, the majority having more than 15 years of teaching experience. And, because this award is facilitated through a professional development organization explicitly focused on history, the teachers sampled tended to have myriad professional opportunities focused on historical knowledge either through their affiliation with this organization or through other opportunities for teacher learning. For example, six of the teachers interviewed had their Ph.D. in history and/or education and one was a doctoral candidate. Multiple teachers discussed being on the Ph.D. track after receiving their master's degrees, but instead opting to become secondary teachers instead, and two more mentioned having parents who were professors. In each of these ways, this sample of teachers evoked a sense of comfort with academia. Teachers' professional

experiences and historical content knowledge is an important aspect to raise because this group of teachers were very familiar with historical content related to the history of race in either or both the United States and the world contexts. This is an important counterweight to Howard's (2006) argument that white people lack the historical knowledge to even be aware of their racial privilege.

Race is a central thread of American history. As such, how these teachers think about race and interweave it in their teaching of history provides rich portraits of deep thinking, practice, and the expanse of understandings about race. Moreover, the fact that these individuals have been put forth as role models for their communities and states serves as a potential indicator about the larger priorities and undergirding beliefs of the field of K-12 history education more broadly, telegraphing the values and beliefs that states hold about who and what constitutes exemplary teachers/teaching and in doing so, signals additional information about states' priorities and commitments related to what should be taught about race and racism.

The chart below illustrates some key demographic information of the survey respondents. The sample was mostly evenly distributed across geographic regions. Perhaps most notably, 97% (n=70) of survey respondents identified as white while only 3% (n=2) identified as people of color. This statistic alone raises many questions about the selection criteria by which teachers of the year are awarded, and who and why particular teachers are recognized while others are not. Notably, none of the survey questions were required, and thus, some respondents did not answer all questions (hence the different numerical responses).

Figure 1

Overview of Teacher Demographics Based on Survey Responses

Experience Teaching	15 or more years	8 or more years		
	80%	20%		
School level	High School	Middle School		
	68%	33%		
Student demographics	Predominantly White	Racially/Ethnically Diverse		
	61%	29%		
Community type	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Small Town
	42%	21%	20%	12%
School type	Public	Private	Charter	Other
	82%	10%	4%	5%

Participant Selection

During Summer and Fall 2021, I distributed an online survey to a pool of teachers who have been named as state finalists for the GLI’s National History Teacher of the Year award which has been awarded annually since 2004. Survey recipients were based on a publicly available list of finalists for the GLNHTOY award. Using this list, I first conducted basic google searches of teachers’ names and states to locate email addresses and ascertain whether they were still teaching in the classroom. I was able to acquire contacts starting in 2009. At that point the award alternated between elementary and secondary awardees on an annual basis, which meant that certain years did not elicit any secondary teachers (2011, 2013, 2015).

However, starting in 2016, the award was exclusively given to secondary teachers. I distributed the survey to 308 teachers, 21 of these emails bounced, and in total 114 teachers completed the survey, constituting a 40% response rate.

Participants in the interview phase of the study were first determined by those who affirmatively stated their willingness to further participate in the project (n=72); described themselves as white; were not elementary teachers; and were actively teaching and not retired. From this subset of survey respondents, I coded survey responses in order to obtain as diverse a sample as possible, with attention to region and state, school type (private, public, charter, etc.), community type (urban, suburban, rural, small town), student demographics (predominantly white, predominantly non-white), and ideological diversity, analyzing teachers' Likert-scale responses to categorize them as non-racist, antiracist, or ideologically inconsistent, as expanded on in my analysis section. With these qualifiers in mind, I began to contact teachers to schedule interviews. In some cases, teachers eagerly signed up, and in other cases, I contacted teachers multiple times, sometimes to no avail. Because I strived for a diverse sample of participants, I eventually contacted the most recent 2021 finalists of the GLI teacher-of-the-year award for interviews, which bolstered the diversity of my sample.

I ended up with 39 interview participants representative of 30 states, the District of Columbia, and 1 Department of Defense School in the South Pacific. For purposes of anonymity and protection, I include a chart linking participants' pseudonyms only to their respective region rather than state. Because their names are

publicly available as winners of national contests, explicitly stating their states risks opening them up to identification and myriad potential risks. Instead, I heretofore identify teachers' regions and describe their state in as much detail as possible to contextualize their school and communities, without risking revealing their identifying state.

Figure 2:*List of Participants*

Name	Race	Region	School type	Community type	Student demographics	Initial orientation based on survey
Eric	white	Northeast	magnet	urban	Diverse	AR
Leo	white	Midwest	public	urban	Diverse	AR
Nick	white	Northeast	public	urban	Predominantly students of color	*
Owen	white	Southeast	public	suburban	Predominantly white	*
Trip	white	DOD	private	island	Predominantly students of color	*
Tyler	white	Southwest	public	urban	Predominantly students of color	*
Francesca	white	West	charter	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Jack	white	West	public	suburban	Diverse	II
Maureen	white	West	charter	rural	Predominantly white	II
Delia	white	Midwest	public	small town	Predominantly white	II
Drake	white	Southeast	private	urban	Predominantly white	*
Cathy	white	Southeast	public	rural	Diverse	II
Frank	white	Northeast	private	urban	Predominantly white	AR
Polly	white	Southeast	charter	urban	Predominantly white	AR
Helen	white	West	public	small town	Predominantly white	*
Colleen	white	Southeast	public	small town	Diverse	*
Harold	white	Midwest	public	small town	Predominantly white	II
Peter	Hispanic, white	Northeast	private	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Marie**	white	Southwest	public	suburban	Diverse	*
Ursula	white	Southwest	public	urban	Predominantly students of color	II
William	white	Midwest	public	rural	Predominantly white	*
Zeke	white	West	magnet	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Brenda	white	Midwest	public	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Caden	white	West	public	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Courtney	white	Northeast	public	rural	Predominantly white	AR
Carla	white	Southwest	public	suburban	Predominantly students of color	AR
Susan**	white	Southeast	magnet	urban & rural	Diverse	II
Elizabeth**	white	Southeast	magnet	suburban	Predominantly white	II
Michelle	white	Southeast	public	suburban	Predominantly white	II
Arthur	white	Northeast	public	urban	Diverse	II
Kevin	white	Midwest	public	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Christina**	white	Northeast	public	suburban	Predominantly white	II
Vernon	white	West	public	urban	Diverse	AR
Ariella	white	Midwest	public	urban	Predominantly students of color	*
Lauren	white-coded, native	Southeast	charter	suburban	Predominantly white	*
Ronald	white	Midwest	public	rural	Predominantly white	II
Stuart	white	Southeast	private	suburban	Predominantly white	II

Olivia	white	Midwest	public	suburban	Predominantly white	AR
Mia**	white	Southwest	public	suburban	Predominantly white	II

*n/a did not complete survey

** reported altering their curriculum based on anti-CRT measures/restrictions

AR= Antiracist

II= ideologically inconsistent

Figure 3

Overview of Interview Participants

Region	West	Southwest	Midwest	Northeast	Southeast	DOD
	18%	13%	23%	18%	27%	3%
School Type	Public	Private	Charter	Magnet		
	64%	13%	13%	10%		
Community	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Small Town	Island	
	31%	44%	15%	10%	3%	
Student demographics	Predominantly white	Predominantly students of color	Diverse			
	62%	15%	23%			
Gender Identity	Cis-men	Cis-women				
	49%	51%				

Why White Teachers?

My rationale for limiting my interview sample to white teachers is motivated by the finding that studies of antiracism have tended to focus on students and teachers of color and fewer examine the ways that white teachers metabolize and transmit their own racial sense making regardless of who is in their classroom. I lean on the argument here that antiracism should not be delimited to classrooms full of students

of color, but rather that all history classrooms are “racial projects,” (Omi & Winant, 1994), in the ways that they help students understand how notions of nationalism, colonialism, and race interplay in history-making.

I am additionally motivated by the broadly accepted understanding that people of color hold views of race and racism that are embodied, personal, and more comprehensive than those who are white. While Leonardo (2008) argued that anyone, including people of color, can rely on White racial knowledge, a White racial frame (Cabrera, 2016) tends to shape the knowledges possessed and enacted by white people.

Finally, the vast majority of survey respondents identified as white (98%). The overwhelming whiteness of the award-winning body of history teachers raises questions about the organizational structures of the awarding body, who the organization caters to, and what states and organizations tend to value in terms of “excellence.” Moreover, while the number of white GLNHTOY teachers is higher than the national average, the teacher profession in the United States remains disproportionately white, according to the most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). These questions, while not within the scope of this dissertation, are worth further examination in terms of access, values, and excellence.

Data Analysis

Because the dissertation involved mixed methods research, in the sections below, I first detail my process of analyzing the survey and I follow with an explanation of my

analysis of the semi-structured interviews and how this process shaped the explorations in each findings chapter.

Analysis of Surveys

To analyze the surveys, I engaged in two different analytical exercises. First, using the software platform Qualtrics, I generated descriptive statistics to examine examining relationships between teachers' demographic information (race, region, school and community context, student demographics, and years teaching) and responses to the questions pertaining to their initial views on race as applied to their teaching, and in relationship to their views about antiracism and whether they identify as antiracist educators. Examining these statistics revealed descriptive information about teachers' racial backgrounds (98% identified as white) and their teaching contexts. It also revealed patterns regarding contextual factors that figured into teachers' approaches. For example, I found that 100% of teachers of predominantly non-white students disagreed with teaching race as about skin color (indicative of a biological interpretation of race), while only 62% of teachers of predominantly white students did so. These findings presented potential discrepancies between biracial definitions of race based on student population and thus pointed to new questions to ask during the interview portion of the research and helped refine analytical codes.

Second, I sought to identify the broader patterns of responses to the Likert scale questions, particularly regarding teachers' orientations on race and the blunt definitions that could be applied using apriori codes from the existing literature on antiracism/non-racism/racism. To do so, I disaggregated the people who had agreed

to an interview from those who had not (n=72). I then coded their surveys based on their responses to Likert-scale questions, using blunt categories of antiracist and non-racist, relying on King & Chandler's (2016) theorization of those categories and upon which the Likert responses were generated (in addition to Knowles & Hawkman's (2019) racial fragility scales).

Broadly speaking, King & Chandler described non-racism as the "passive rejection, opposition and dissociation from behaviors, discourse, and ideology that are considered racist. Non-racist frameworks define racism as extreme, overt, highly visible behavior that consists of irrational and independent actions of individuals" (2016, p. 8). Race evasion (Annamma et al., 2016) could also be considered a coterminous concept, in line with what Bonilla-Silva (2003) termed colorblindness whereby racism continues to occur though without racists or specific people to blame. They define antiracism, by contrast, as an "active rejection of the institutional and structural aspects of race and racism and explains how racism is manifested in various spaces, making the social construct of race visible" (p. 5).

Surveys whose responses reflected stances representative of both antiracism and non-racism or wherein respondents frequently utilized "somewhat" or "neither agree nor disagree," were coded as 'ideologies in pieces' drawing on Philip's (2011) theorization. It is important to note that these Likert scale questions were intended as blunt instruments in acknowledgement that they do not allow room for nuanced positions. In applying these initial codes, I was only conducting an initial survey of responses in service of the study design, which foregrounded the qualitative

interview, and sought to interview subjects who represented a range of initial ideological stances about race/racism. The chart below illustrates how I initially approached coding the surveys. As a note: some respondents (n=13) did not answer all the Likert style questions and thus were excluded from the initial coding scheme and removed from the sample.

Figure 4:

Survey Coding Scheme

	Characteristics
Antiracism (n=26)	Teaches about race as a social construct; Sees self as an antiracist educator; Race/racism is central in curriculum; Teaches about the history of White supremacy; Believes that teaching about race is an important part of antiracist education
Non-racism (n=7)	Teaches students that race is primarily about skin color; Does not see self as an antiracist educator; Race/racism is not central in curriculum; Tries not to see students' race; Does not teach about the history of White supremacy Does not believe that teaching about race/racism is an important part of antiracist education
Ideologies in pieces (n=26)	Selected responses that included elements of both of the above positions; Responded frequently with “somewhat” and/or “neither agree nor disagree”

Analysis of Interviews

Analysis of this dissertation draws largely upon the 39 interviews that I conducted and recorded on Zoom. They were then transcribed using Sonix, an online transcription service, and then manually corrected to rectify inaccuracies. Next, interview transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software platform, MAXQDA. Initial coding began with descriptive coding where I broke transcripts into discrete parts to organize the data. These codes were based on the questions that I

had asked in the interviews, some of which included race, background, school context, views of antiracism, approaches to antiracism, historical explanations, responsibilities and goals, and more (for example, I noted when teachers would describe their defense against anti-CRT movements as including primary sources under the descriptive category of “disciplinary responses.” Other descriptive code examples included “racial identity,” “January 6,” “antiracist definitions,” “race,” and “historical content” when teachers invoked historical events.

From there, I conducted additional rounds of coding, this time subsuming descriptive categories based on theme, engaging in iterative cycles of *in vivo*/open and *a priori* coding stemming from literature (Saldaña, 2013). Examples of these codes brought in elements of symbolic interactionism and critical perspectives. For example, the descriptive code of “race,” included 40 related codes including *in vivo* terms like “They don’t always have to wear a badge of shame” (Owen) and “How we have measured people,” (Marie); further descriptive codes such as “Origins,” which were indicative of teachers’ historical understandings of race and racism (which became its own descriptive category); and *a priori* codes such as “biological,” and “individualized,” referring to when teachers’ definitions of race reflected interpretations commonly expounded upon in the literature (see Figure 5 for a comprehensive list of codes for “race”). As I moved iteratively through these interviews, these codes became further and further refined. Upon honing themes, I engaged in axial coding, examining data across cases and engaged in identifying sub-codes, merging codes, and highlighting new categories based on the data. The coding

process was neither linear nor sequential, and instead required going back and forth between interviews and emerging concepts, patterns, and categories. At various stages throughout the interviewing and coding process, I engaged in analytic memoing where I logged emerging questions, themes, and patterns that helped me make sense of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

My methodological grounding in symbolic interactionism and critical language studies also framed the way that I interpreted data, especially in places where I noticed moments of rupture that pointed to deeper ideological indicators related to race and racism. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the dialogic relationship that individuals have with their social contexts and seeks to identify naturalized axioms i.e., commonsense beliefs. Indicative of my application of an analytical frame grounded in symbolic interactionism, in chapter 5, I trained my eye explicitly on racial axioms or naturalized commonsense beliefs teachers held about race/racism, identifying in Ronald and Elizabeth's discourse axioms that included "racial progress," "meritocracy," and "anti-Blackness." Applying a critical language studies frame enabled me to interpret implicit beliefs as they came through on a linguistic level, beyond what teachers stated explicitly. At different points in analyzing teachers' interviews, I encountered discursive moments signaling contradictions a la Philip's (2011) framing "ideology in pieces," and other places that required additional analysis to unpack the power-related assumptions implicit in teacher's descriptions. In these cases, I conducted more fine-grained analysis of the language used by teachers seeking to understand how their discourse was inflected with beliefs about

power dynamics, as related to race. I noticed discursive elements such as pronouns, nominations (e.g., how individuals were named and described); and transitivity (e.g., who are actors and who is acted upon). I identified 94 different instances of words and phrases requiring additional analysis. Some of these examples included instances where teachers used nominations like “gangbangers,” (Maureen) to describe former students, or turns of phrase like “having a Black baby,” when talking about how much her students of color admired her (Cathy). Both these neologisms were tinged with racism, even when using them as a testament to their own lack of racism (as was the case for Cathy). Other discursive moments were less overt, yet still indicated a racial distance. These moments included pronouns like “them,” “we,” and “Americans.” In each of these cases, the language wielded by teachers provided additional insights into their broader racial ideologies and worldviews. An example of how I conducted more fine-grained analysis using a CLS framework is observable in Chapter 5 where I break down Ronald’s discourse on page 118.

Because each findings chapter asked a different question of the data, different levels of analyses were necessary to thoroughly explore the different questions asked of the data. Chapter 4 offers a zoomed-out look at the racial ideologies of teachers across all 39 interview cases and thus specifically explores teachers’ responses to the questions about how they thought about and taught about race, racism, whiteness, and antiracism to their students. Chapter 5 looks closely at two teachers’ discursive representations of race/racism to examine the linguistic elements that characterized their vacillating and confused racial ideologies via naturalized racial axioms (Philip,

2011). Chapter 6 again zooms out, examining how teachers' community contexts connected to their willingness to engage with risk in their teaching, especially in the face of attacks on "Critical Race Theory," describing some of the tactics engaged by teachers navigating various level of hostility in their sociopolitical contexts. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the practices and limits of teachers engaging in various levels of history/social studies-specific disciplinary antiracism, e.g., the use of disciplinary history practices towards critical ends, in service of an antiracist agenda and/or to subvert antagonistic contextual critique.

Theory of Transcription

In the drafting of each findings chapter, I opted to transcribe interview data to best enable the ease of reading. This meant that, following Gee (2015), I broke up longer dialogue blocks into smaller subsets of text, using a style that broke up texts by lines "i.e., clauses and simple sentences" and by stanzas "i.e., sets of lines about a single minimal topic, organized rhythmically and syntactically so as to hang together in a particularly tight way" (p. 119). Incorporating the key chunks of text this way enabled me to highlight for the reader the larger narrative circulating in some cases (what Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) called "big gulps" of text, (p.2)), and in other cases, to focus more on the elements of critical discourse analysis which required fine-tuned analysis of language. For the sake of the readers, I chose to eliminate verbal repetition (for example, if a participant repeated a phrase twice) and I often used ellipses to eliminate dialogue that was not necessarily relevant to the overarching message of their speech. I also chose not to incorporate "idiosyncratic elements of speech e.g.,

stutters, pauses, nonverbal, or involuntary vocalizations” (like coughing) (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1273-1274) for ease of reading.

I made the choice to ignore the “verbal clutter” that discourse analysts have argued can be signals for participants eliding invocations of racism because I was more interested in the performance/presentation of the knowledge regarding race and racism rather than the ways in which teachers avoided those discussions. Because I knew so little about these teachers outside of what they reported on surveys and interviews, I wanted to avoid making too many assumptions about the rationales for why they included or omitted particular phrases, why they stumbled over certain terms, or assign reasons for coughs, yawns, or pauses. Instead, I chose to foreground teachers’ content—what they actually said about race and racism, and thus, I transcribed their oral expressions into written dialogue to provide the most ease in reading and interpreting.

Figure 5

Analytic Process

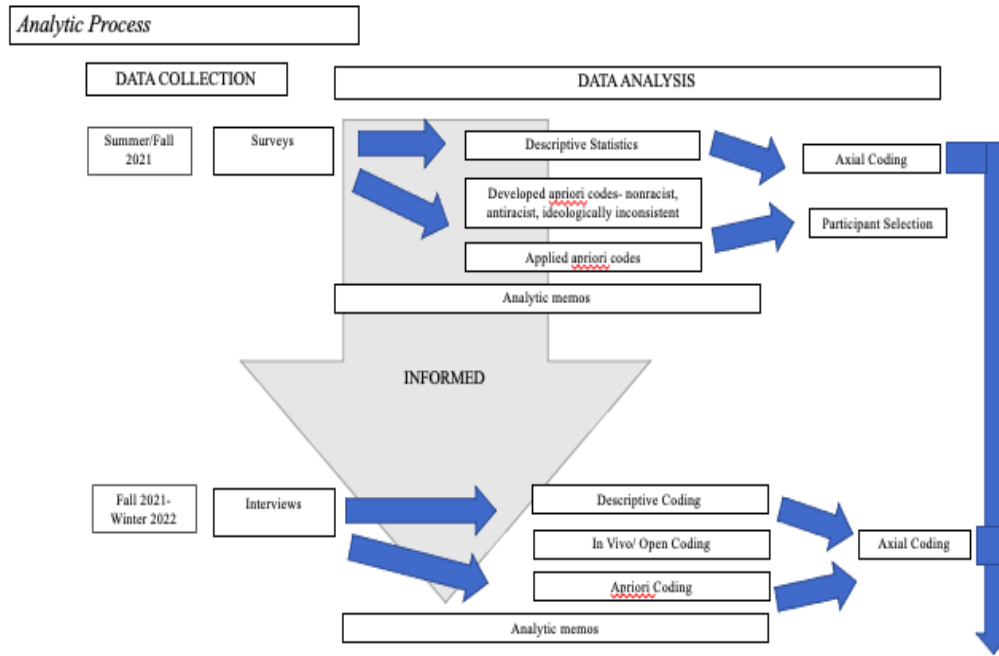


Figure 6:

Example of Coding Categories

“Race”	Occurrences
Individualized	1
“It’s not in the curriculum”	1
Biological	6
Global racialization	1
Hard to teach contemporary	1
Environmental racism	1
“Not about color”	1
Lynching	8
Police brutality	10
Institutional racism	1
Race as people of color	3
“How we have measured people”	1
Stereotypes	4
Black Lives Matter	12
Indigeneity	4
Chattel slavery	10
Origins of race	23
“How does race impact your ability in this country?”	1
Medical racism	2
Anti-Blackness	2
Imperialism	9
“Immense amount of freedom to be straightforward”	1
Obama	1
“Race is a thing that categorizes people”	1
Use of history to describe race	2
Social construct	23
Construct but racism is real	2
“Caste” by Isabel Wilkerson	1
Race and ethnicity	6
Systemic racism	21
“They don’t always have to wear a badge of shame”	1
Color celebrate	7
Racism	20
Colorblind	13
Whiteness/ White Supremacy	71
Personal animus	5
Making assumptions	2
Uncomfortable	6
Hard conversations	3

Researcher Positionality

My rationale for this study was informed by my own experience learning about the history of race and whiteness. It was not until I took a class titled “Race, Whiteness, and Education” with Dr. Zeus Leonardo in Spring 2019 that whiteness became a tangible, historicized construction to me and that was despite having majored in Africana Studies as an undergraduate and completing a master’s in teaching with a specialty in urban education and social justice. While I became well-versed in race, racism, and how these historical threads related to educational inequity, I was not necessarily able to articulate how these histories directly connected to whiteness, other than superficial explanations involving white supremacy and white privilege. I lacked the details to fill in how whiteness was created and continues, albeit differently, over time. Nor was I necessarily conscious of the ways that whiteness shaped my own familial experiences as a Jewish woman. My patrilineal great grandmother hid her identity as a Russian Jew and changed her name to marry an Irishman, and on my matrilineal side, despite enjoying great financial success, my mother and her family lived, in many ways, within a segregated St. Louis, confined to Jewish-only spaces. And yet, every fifteen-year-old girl, on her birthday, would get a nose job, signaling the various strategies of recruitment into whiteness. When I talk to Jewish people my parents’ age, they tell me, we were not white then, but we are white now. Of course, it is worth noting the history of how white racialization has shaped the Jewish community in both the United States and globally— having created its own caste system of sorts whereby Ashkenazi Jews, or

those deriving from Eastern Europe, enjoy far more access to whiteness, and therefore privilege, than Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Jews of Color.

I provide these examples to demonstrate the durability of whiteness, and to show how facily it can escape location and indictment. As illustrated, my training in Africana studies, social justice topics, and my experiences working as a history teacher with predominantly students of color were insufficient in instructing me on the history of whiteness. I, too, had not thought complexly enough about the structural creations of white supremacy. My experiences, coupled with the research literature pointing to the various ways in which white ignorance is perpetuated, informs my overarching interest in this study, and raises questions: what if a story of whiteness were told? What would it include? And how might shifting the unit of analysis from racism to whiteness change the ways that teachers understand and teach their students about the history of the United States? Finally, what might it look like if systemic whiteness was taught in predominantly white and affluent schools like the ones I attended? While this study does not address each of these questions, exploring racial ideologies of history teachers from a range of backgrounds seems a worthy first step in insinuating whiteness into social studies curriculum and research.

According to Woods (1996), “the researcher does not stand above or outside the research...the researcher’s self is inextricably bound up with the research” (p. 51). While my position as a doctoral candidate had no tangible bearing on the work of any of the teachers who opted to participate in this study, my identity as a white, middle-class, cisgender woman, who formerly taught history inevitably shaped the ways that

participants perceived me. I believe that some found commonality with me as a fellow white person, giving them license to talk about race in ways that they may not have otherwise felt comfortable. Some participants got deep, and even cried, when discussing the ways that they had and were continuing to grapple with their whiteness.

For some, I conferred a sense of removed judgment or affirmation. For example, one teacher from the South recounted to me an incident of public shaming and asked me if what I thought I had heard was normal. Another teacher from the Northeast asked me whether I thought, based on what I had heard, that they were antiracist, seeking approval as the ‘good’ white person (Haviland, 2008). Interviewees frequently asked whether they had given enough information. I do think that there was an element of performing as good white people for me, carefully treading to avoid being perceived as racist or not doing enough. A few participants were more suspicious of me and my motives—they tended to be a bit reserved, especially at first, in responding to their interviews. In some of these cases, teachers asked me if I had gotten the answers that I was looking for. My questions about antiracism seemed to be particularly fraught for a few teachers who asked me, who would admit to being racist? In these cases, which relied on some orientation towards antiracism, I was not sure if teachers fully grasped the question or whether they lacked contextual discursive information to respond.

Ethical Considerations/ Limitations

It must be acknowledged that this study is largely based on teachers' self-reporting, and we know that what teachers say about what they teach does not directly translate to their practice. A large body of research has captured how teachers' views can be disconfirmed by their actual pedagogical enactments. Moreover, just because someone says they are antiracist does not make it so. As Niemonen (2007) pointed out, "An understanding of racism is insufficient to guarantee antiracist behavior..." (p. 162). Moreover, Ohito (2020) demonstrated the disconnection between antiracism theory and practice, alerting us to the clashes between enactments of antiracism and enactments of whiteness that happen in educational contexts specifically designed to disrupt racism. Finally, no one wants to be perceived as racist. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) argued, following the civil rights movement, racist discourse shifted from overt in form to underground, coded, and often hard to pinpoint. This means that this study risks relying on teachers who simply report what they hope I (the researcher) wants to hear, or what they believe will lead them to be perceived as not racist. These are real concerns.

Still, because the focus of this study is in large part about tracing discourses and trying to understand how expert white history teachers' articulations of race, racism, and whiteness vary, hide, change over time etc., and imprint on the histories they teach, regardless of teachers' pedagogical applications, this study still matters. Symbolic interactionism and narrative theory are based on making meaning out of what people share with you and because I believe that language had determining

power in terms of protecting or dismantling existing power structures, what teachers say about race, racism, and whiteness, and antiracism and what they say about how these topics connect to their teaching, reflect their ideological standpoints. What, out of all available meanings, teachers decide to share telegraphs their commitments, their racialized beliefs, and much more. Few research studies explicitly try to pin down teachers' racial ideologies without using proxy concepts like equity or diversity. This study explicitly asked teachers to recount the histories of race and connect them to their own lives and how they view their teaching. Obtaining these narratives and exploring how they intersect and diverge may be instructive for future antiracist interventions.

It is also important to note that the point of this study is not to demonize white people or call everyone racist. As Bonilla-Silva (2014) put it, “hunting for “racists” is the sport of choice of those who practice the “clinical approach” to race relations—the careful separation of good and bad, tolerant and intolerant Americans....” (p. 15). Nor is it intended to distinguish between “good” white people and bad white people (Hayes and Juárez, 2009). On the contrary, because I subscribe to a structural understanding of race, my purpose with this project is to uncover the messy ideological meaning-making process engaged in by individuals across differences. Leonardo (2004a) argued that “to the extent that racial supremacy is taught to white students, it is pedagogical. Insofar as it is pedagogical, there is the possibility of critically reflecting on its flows in order to disrupt them” (p. 142). Because racial supremacy is taught, logic presumes that it can be untaught— unlearned, rejected, or

that perhaps what is taught can change. In his discussion on white ignorance, Mills (2007) reasoned, “What makes such denial possible, of course, is the management of memory” (p. 28). In this dissertation study, I study the process by which memories are “managed” in hopes of coming to new understandings regarding how to dismantle white supremacy.

Chapter 4: The Work of Racecraft in Teachers' Narrations of Race, Racism, and Whiteness

Overview

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the qualitative data in the dissertation, exploring the research questions: how do teachers narrate race, racism, and whiteness and how do these concepts manifest in their descriptions of their teaching practices and curricula? As argued in the literature review, an abundance of research has traced how white teachers thwart or deflect from learning about race and racism, particularly as pre-service teachers. Fewer studies examine the racial knowledge of white teachers in the context of their own lives, their explanations of societal inequality, and in the choices that they make about how to deploy historical knowledge when teaching their students. Moreover, while race scholars from many disciplines agree that race is a social construction (albeit with real, material consequences) (Omi & Winant, 1994; Leonardo, 2004b), studies have shown that race tends to be understood as biologically bound rather than socially constructed (Sleeter, 1993), and racism is often individualized, rather than systemically framed (Wills, 2001, 2019). Additional research, like Martell & Stevens (2018), has shown that high school teachers report feeling comfortable with teaching about race and racism, yet little is known about how that content is taught, the historical events drawn upon, nor the racial logics that underpin their teaching. As I have written about previously (2021), even when teachers purportedly teach the same historical events, their narrations can be

completely different depending on their epistemological bent, their teaching commitments, their historical understandings, and their racial ideologies.

Critical of the “trite” formula, ‘race as a social construction,’ Fields & Fields (2014) pushed these lines of race research further (p. 100). They situate race as “not an idea but an ideology [that] came into existence at a discernible historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reason.” They provide historical context for the “public language of ‘race’ that emerged out of enslavement as a means to disguise and justify inequality. While they assert race as a fallacy parallel with concepts like witchcraft and the “evil eye,” they locate racism as belonging to “the same family as murder and genocide,” arguing that “racism, unlike race, is not a fiction, an illusion, a superstition or a hoax. It is a crime against humanity” (p. 100-101). For Fields & Fields (2014), the continued usage and reliance on language of race inevitably protects racism for, “No operation performed on the fiction can ever make headway against the crime (p. 101).” Within history/social studies education research, like other social sciences, racecraft, or the false presumption of naturalness of race, continues to be pervasive. Thus, by applying the theoretical framing of racecraft to my analysis of teachers’ racial ideologies, I hope to destabilize taken-for-granted notions of race that permeate not only history/social studies education research, but also the teaching of history more broadly. As Fields & Fields (2014) prove, race is a historical entity—designed and implemented to fulfill particular aims, and thus, historicizing race—where the concept emerged from, the societal role it has played in shaping our lives, and how it

has changed over time are critical steps in deflating its assumed real-ness.

In this chapter I explore how teachers describe what race is and its role in society, contrasting teachers who understand and teach about race as a construction with those whose conceptions of race err towards either a biological understanding, or whose racial logics remained opaque or muddled. I follow with an inquiry into how teachers understand and teach about racism using the competing frames of systemic versus individualized racism to capture their framing. I end by synthesizing the patterns of thought that teachers' historical narratives rely on. Throughout this chapter I use Fields & Fields (2014) theorization of 'racecraft' as both a framework for understanding the work that teachers are doing in upholding or puncturing naturalized notions of race, and also a guidepost by which to measure the efficacy of teachers' teaching of racism. As they argue, "what is needed is not a more varied set of words and categories to represent racism but a politics to uproot it" (p. 109).

Teachers' Conceptualizations of Race

When asked about how they understand what race is and the role it plays in society, of the 39 teachers interviewed, 22 (56%) explicitly defined race as a social construction, and a subset of those teachers (n=11) reported teaching it as such to their students. Another group of teachers did not explicitly define race (n=13), and instead responded with more opaque explanations such as "race is central and we haven't found a way to address it," (Frank) or with very specific references to their local context, in some cases, highlighting the diversity of their student population (Arthur), or referencing the need for civility (Stuart). Finally, three teachers defined

race as biologically determined or connoted a sense of inflexibility and permanence in their descriptions.

Understanding Race as a Social Construction

The majority of teachers interviewed conveyed an understanding of race as socially constructed. While these definitions varied to some extent, there were common through-lines in this subgroup, notably that race has been used to defend inequality and justify enslavement, very much in line with Fields & Fields' (2014) argument that race was used to justify inequality. For example, Tyler, a teacher from a Southwestern state who taught at a magnet school with predominantly Latinx students, defined race as a "human construct used to categorize through time, in some cases to deny rights to certain people." Marie from a Southwestern state, described race as "how we have measured people...it is institutionalized in how we see people and the effect of it is everywhere I look." Carla, who taught in a racially and ethnically diverse high school in the Southwest, elaborated on the integrality of the construction of race with American society, reasoning,

Race is a construct, and it's something that has been used to decide who has power and who gets to be a part of that power. Just looking at examples where racial definitions have changed, it has to do more with power than biology and it is kind of the foundation of American society, so it's in every part of history. So, you can't remove teaching American history from talking about how race is constructed.

Brenda, a teacher in the upper Midwest, similarly applied her understanding of race as a social construct directly to history, explaining “We really start getting into the idea that race is indeed a social construct and there’s zero difference between these people, except for in America at least, slavery becomes something that is basically decided by the color of your skin.” Notably, each of these teachers’ explanations of race used the language of construction to illustrate what race is, tending to focus on the aspects of measurement and categorization, noting how race shapes “how we see people.” However, these teachers do not explicitly use racial labels in their explanations of race; instead relying on neutral language like “we,” “people,” “certain people,” and “who has power.” In this way, these explanations effectively detach the creation of racial labels from the original impetus for their implementation e.g., enslavement, capitalism, and white supremacy. In the lack of specific illumination, they risk sanitizing the reality of race in the United States, removing the rationale for why race was created in the first place.

By contrast, Michelle, who taught in a rural district in a Southeastern state, explained that in her classes they explore how slavery morphed during the colonial and antebellum eras and explicitly references the label “Black”:

Due to the force of both economics and social pressures, you get the dropping of indentured servants and the increased demand for slaves or reliance on slavery and how the need to control a large, enslaved population requires such repressive tactics. But then that gets fused with skin color because these slaves, you know, are Black. So there's a very noticeable physical difference

that everything that gets ascribed to as slaves to try and repress them... gets superimposed on skin color and how that is really where we kind of see that origin of racism in the United States.

In this explanation, Michelle made the connection between the construction of race with the establishment of an economic system rooted in chattel slavery, noting how physical differences like skin color were operationalized to justify repression. This description is perhaps the most fleshed out disruption of what Fields & Fields (2014) termed “racecraft,” which argues that the foregrounding of skin color as the impetus for racism falsely imbues race with a biological basis and in doing so, elides the forces of racism, which is directed by the ideology of race itself. Here Michelle demonstrated how the process worked and how the need to repress Black people gets “superimposed on skin color.” In this explanation, Michelle made clear how ideas of inferiority become conflated with Blackness or the framing of “race,” which then create a permission structure justifying racism.

Teaching the Invention of Race

In addition to articulating an understanding of race as a social construction, some teachers also taught about the creation of race itself to their students, using the context of enslavement and white supremacy as explanatory through-lines. Teachers did so by highlighting the creation of laws that entrenched racial rank or by examining the changing status of African-descended people during early American history noting the hardening distinctions between slaves and indentured servants, free

and unfree, and white and Black over time.

For example, Drake, a teacher at a private school in the Southeast, described how he uses a 1640 Virginia law tying the status of the child to the mother as a means to perpetuate an enslaved population to demonstrate the origins of slavery. Similarly, Olivia, who taught in a suburb of a post-industrial Midwestern city in a Republican-controlled state, described using the date of 1808 to teach her students about the sexual politics of enslavement and the ways in which status as slaves was passed on:

We talk about how 1808 is the last legal importation of enslaved people. I always say human trafficked, that's what it is... But there are other ways to increase the population of enslaved people, especially if you are an enslaver. If you sexually assault your enslaved women, there's no punishment for you, right? If anything, they might have children and guess what? Under the law...even though that is your kid, technically, that kid is a slave. That kid is considered one hundred percent Black because that's the way the law was constructed.

In these examples, teachers showcased how laws were written to differentiate the free status of white people from Black people and centered the role of sexual violence and reproduction were used as means to perpetuate an enslaved workforce.

Other teachers focused on the changing status of indentured servants and enslaved Africans over time as chattel slavery became more prominent in the United States' economy. Ariella, who taught at an all-Black high school in a Midwestern city,

described focusing on the legal construction of race during the 1600s and 1700s as a means to bolster slavery, drawing upon “straightforward historical events” explaining that “first, Africans are brought over as indentured servants and some free people. And then very shortly after that, they transition hardcore into enslaved people.” She described showing her students how legislation, particularly in Virginia and Massachusetts, “differentiates between indentured servants as white people and free people, and enslaved people as Black people,” leading to “the creation of race-based slavery in the United States.” Notably, even though Ariella had students examine the actual laws in this case, her phrasing of “they transition” ascribes a neutrality to the process by which Africans became Black and enslaved, obscuring the actors, the systems, laws, and ideological twisting that created a racialized hierarchy. In that example, despite her commitment to historicizing the process of race-making, Ariella’s word-choice, though likely intended as completely benign, also signifies the ways in which even the simplest turn of phrases can elide responsibility.

Polly, a high school teacher in a racially diverse charter school in a Southern city also used laws to show how race was created, drawing on the case of Elizabeth Key, an enslaved woman who successfully sued for her and her son’s freedom in 1656 to show how laws protecting white supremacy hardened over time. And Courtney, a teacher in a rural part of a Northeastern state described teaching an entire unit on the invention of race, using chapters from Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi’s book *Stamped*, along with excerpts from race scholars like Barbara Fields and the 1619 Project.

Other teachers focused on how race, as a set of ideas, was constructed to provide a rationale that could justify the horrors of enslavement. For example, Michelle explained:

Race is a thing that categories of people get identified as because of some other need because, I always tell my students, you know, if you're enslaving people you need to sleep at night somehow. So how do you justify that? And so, we look at the justifications for slavery. We look at the Mudsill Speech...and it's like the idea of somebody being another race is a convenient way for you to excuse your behavior.

In this case, Michelle touched on the need to justify horrific behaviors, but also used the passive voice to explain the process of getting "identified as," (e.g., raced), which in effect, elided the agents of said categorization. This may be because locating specific or actors is difficult when discussing the construction of an entire system that occurred over time.

Relatedly, for Delia, a middle school English and history teacher in an almost entirely white school in the upper Midwest, described how learning about race as a social construction gave her a new perspective that illuminated the rationale for the establishment of racial categories writ large. She recounted how the concept 'race as a social construct' provided her own "aha moment," shifting her understanding of history and altering the way that she taught her students:

And I was like race and what now? And I started reading and I was like, oh,

this is interesting. Okay, these are things that I was not aware of, like where the ideas we have about race now, where they really came from, and how bound they were by the idea of slavery.

She explained that this realization enabled her to answer her students' questions about why Black people were slaves:

It's a really good question, and it's one that your average 13-year-old is going to come up with because...why are these people slaves and not those ones? And so, when you're able to be like, well, let me tell you that slavery was not always like this. It changed and took on all of these racial overtones. And then pretty soon we have to justify a reason why these people have to be slaves forever and ever and ever when really, it's just because we want them to pick more cotton and yeah, it shifted my ability to answer that question better and made me better able to point out...this isn't a thing, you know, like, how is this person different than that one? They're not.

In this telling, Delia demonstrated how her own consciousness development about the use of race shaped her ability to teach her students in ways that denaturalized race as inborn or permanent. Moreover, in her firm acknowledgement of the lack of real difference between racial groups, Delia is doing the work that Fields & Fields (2014) call for, of addressing the "fiction" that is race. Finally, in both Michelle and Delia's explanations of race, they emphasized the processes through which race was operationalized explicitly acknowledging its work in to justifying the cruelty of

enslavement citing the need to justify one's need to "sleep at night," when really "we want them to pick cotton forever."

Racializing Whiteness

Other teachers specifically taught about the invention of race through its co-construction with whiteness. For example, Carla, a high school teacher in the Southwest also described teaching students about the construction of race through the lens of whiteness, using Bacon's Rebellion to explain how white elites disentangled the shared class interests of white indentured servants and enslaved Black people by offering a psychological wage of whiteness to lower-class white people (DuBois, 1935). Trip, who taught in an American school in the US territories similarly drew on Bacon's Rebellion along with Nancy Isenberg's, *White Trash*, to demonstrate how race was used to divide class allegiances.

Olivia explained how she grapples with whiteness in her US history courses, asking, "What is whiteness and how [has] whiteness changed throughout history?" She elaborated:

There's been times with certain groups that today we just kind of think are white, were not deemed white or were deemed "less than white." And then what does that even mean, right? So we look at legally how this became sort of a construct going all the way back into colonial Virginia and looking at the Barbados slave code; we talk a lot about Homer Plessy, right, and the fact that he was essentially 7/8 white, whatever that means, right? I say, what does that

even mean? People aren't divided into pie pieces.

In this explanation, Olivia alluded to different groups gaining access to whiteness at different points in history. Her repeated asking of “what does that even mean?” along with her note that people are not “divided into pie pieces” highlights her view of the absurdity of race itself. In her disbelief and illumination of various legal codes that inscribed whiteness and blackness differently, Olivia illuminated the construction of race for her students and punctured assumptions of its presumed naturalness.

While he denied using the term “whiteness” with his students, in part out of fear of parent pushback, William, a teacher in a small town in the rural Midwest perforated inborn ideas of whiteness by highlighting the inaccuracy of racial categories. He explained,

I'm not this color, but it's the color that I identify on applications and things like that. Because kids will say [they are] white Caucasian. I say, well, I'm not from the Caucasus region, I'm not from that part of the country. I usually say Euro-American, or European ancestry.

Here, William challenged a normalized categorical description of whiteness (Caucasian) that upon inspection is completely illogical, falsely linking a geographic location on the border of Europe and Asia with the racial category of white. William correctly pointed out, he is not from that region, and he is “not this color,” meaning that his skin is not actually physically white. As Fields & Fields (2014) pointed out, “physical description follows race, not the other way around” (p. 147). In this

seemingly simple way, William illuminated for students the folly of race both as a marker of skin color, and in the commonplace terms of use.

Michelle spent time teaching students about the growth of white supremacist ideologies asserting Europeans as superior to all others, shedding light not only on the relationship between “white” and everybody else, but also amongst peoples who today are considered white. She recounted:

We're getting ready to look at that, how they actively try to drop the idea of Eastern and Southern Europeans as a different race when we fight in WWII and how we're all just American at that point. And there's this interesting research I did...about the role of teachers... get people to see white Americans all as one group of people ... Europeans, Jews and the Italians and whatever all in that [group] rather than being separate.

In this example, Michelle highlighted what Painter (2010) has termed the third enlargement of American whiteness whereby WWII “rearranged millions of Americans,” by recoding various European ethnicities as “white” which she pointed out, “often meant joining antiblack racism” (p. 363). Here Michelle again linked the ways in which racialization has been utilized to segment the population, though still in service to white supremacy. Along these lines, Drake described having his students read Noel Ignatiev’s seminal text, *How the Irish Became White* noting that his students are always surprised, “what, my people weren’t considered white?” And Courtney, who like William, denied talking about whiteness as “you know, like Nell

Painter,” described talking with students about the discrimination against the Irish and how “after the Civil War, certain groups of people banded together and found solidarity in each other just because they weren't black.”

By demonstrating how notions of which groups are considered white have shifted over time in service of racism, these teachers insinuated whiteness into conversations where “race” is generally translated to mean Black. As Fields & Fields (2014) pointed out, “Americans regard people of known African descent or visible African appearance as a race, but not people of known European descent or visible European appearance” (p. 115). Matias (2016) expanded on this point arguing that frequently, white people have “no awareness of whiteness as a construction, let alone their own role in sustaining and playing out in the inequities” (p. 100). By showing students the historical grounding of and shifting definitions of whiteness and at times, pointing out the illogicality of racial categories writ large, these teachers adhered to Fields & Fields’ (2014) call to restore race with its “proper history,” and in doing so, began to rupture a racial ideology operating as uncontroversial and taken for granted (p. 121).

Expanding Lenses of Race & Racism

Other teachers drew upon other disciplinary frameworks that informed their understandings of race. Francesca drew upon psychological frameworks while Polly pulled from her background in anthropology. These views informed the ways that they understand race, the language that they used, and the types of foci that they employed in their teaching. For example, Francesca talked about race from a

psychological perspective explaining that while there are physical characteristics that make up race, social dynamics, norms, and expectations, along with oppression “create hierarchies” based on race. Moreover, she asserted,

Because we know from a very young age infants can determine human difference, whether that be race or gender, or any of those physical characteristics or traits, and we know that recognizing difference is not necessarily an issue...It's when societies put frameworks around how different races act or how different races should be treated or any of those societal types ...That our societal norms really create some of the behavioral outputs that we see towards different races.

In this explanation, Francesca focused on the psychological elements of societal transposing of difference onto hierarchy, describing the gendered and raced messages that people receive as very young children, which then informs their social understandings. In a similar vein, Polly, who had an academic background in anthropology also used that disciplinary knowledge to frame her understanding of race. She introduced students to the notion of cultural construct— e.g., the idea that “different cultures—that we all have norms and values that vary across time and space roughly” and used that idea to teach students about race which made it “less alien” when they “hear this concept that race is something that is simultaneously constructed but important.”

Teachers with backgrounds in history described the construction of race in relation to their own prior historical work. For example, Stuart’s dissertation

examined the contradictions of Jefferson as reported by his peers at the time. This framing informed the way he understood and taught about race. Drake found his Ph.D. in history to have provided him with a critical ground in history that hitherto lacked in his secondary and collegiate experiences studying history. He therefore saw his role as a history teacher (in the school he had attended as a student) as a way to provide alternative understandings to future students. By contrast, Owen received his Ph.D. in ancient civilizations yet found himself teaching early US history to sixth graders. While his content expertise did not translate directly into his curriculum, his goal of preparing students to be critical and empathetic thinkers who could understand different perspectives informed his approach to teaching history and his reliance on source work with his students.

Additionally, teachers' own racial identities informed the way they understood race in nuanced, specific ways. For example, Lauren, who described herself as white-passing and a member of the Cherokee tribe explained that as a member of the treaty-signing family who signed treaties with the American government, her family had been shunned from the tribe for their perceived complicity with land dispossession. She described teaching classes on Native American and African American histories from an embodied stance, understanding the Cherokee as both having been oppressed and disposed by the United States government, while also recognizing their history as having enslaved Black people. She viewed her teaching responsibilities as bound up in those contradictions and aimed to repair relations with both her tribe and with African American peoples in her work outside of school and in her political

grounding as an abolitionist.

While Leo, who taught in a racially diverse public school in a Northern Midwestern state, articulated an understanding of race as a social construction, he also voiced the importance of underscoring for his students the real effects of race on their lives:

Because I work in a very diverse school, I think it's incredibly important to let student voices be heard and get it from their perspective and create a classroom where kids feel safe to express that experience and try to share it with others.

In this sense, Leo was cognizant of the risk of misunderstanding that accompanied teaching his students that race was merely a construction without acknowledging the real and meaningful identity associations that students have about their race and their racialized experiences.

Finally, Peter, who identified as Latino and taught International Baccalaureate courses at a majority-white private school in a Northeastern state, drew upon both a world-historical disciplinary lens and his own personal history to ground his teaching of race, seeking to situate the emergence of American notions of race in terms of the wider scope of world history. He explained that race is an identity marker that “over time [has been] inculcated with economic, social, and cultural notions,” noting that various identity markers have been used over time to divide people, race being just one of them. Because his course drew on “Big History” perspectives that stretched

beyond the traditional Modern European curriculum, Peter introduced more complexity to the study of race with his students, having them debate which was worse: the Atlantic Slave Trade or the period of Islamic Slavery. He explained:

Very few understand that as many people were taken out of Africa as slaves by Muslims over many more centuries, as did. Now what do you make of that right? Now in some places I would be blamed for, 'hey, you know, you're trying to revise this, this this evil that we have done.' Okay. So, I want you to understand that it's not historically unique... Yes, crimes committed against Africa by these two outside civilizations. But they don't fall into, you know, the easy frameworks that are provided today (Lines 651-661)

Here, Peter pushed back on the broadly articulated idea that limited the makings of race to an American-specific context. By reaching beyond the accepted history and incorporating other examples of the ways that race and differences have been weaponized towards certain ends, Peter was attempting to provide nuance and depth to the study of slavery and boundary the emergence of American conceptions of race. Part of Peter's resistance to being limited to the standard American-centric position on race and his interest in complicating race matters may have had to do with his feelings about his own racial identity particularly in the context of his school. An immigrant from Bolivia who had worked in international business and spent many years abroad prior to entering the field of teaching, he described his feelings of being an outsider at his school:

I don't get along very well with the white parents here. I mean, not that I don't get along with, I mean, we're fine now, obviously, but I'm not one of them, so I certainly can't speak for them. And the Black community doesn't, you know, I'm this odd duck, so it's like I might as well not exist as far as the school is concerned because I'm a race that doesn't fit in. But they love to use my kids in their photographs for the school because it brings a little color.

In this sense, although Peter reasoned that “race is one element that we have to think about in this world,” he feared that it has become “the only thing that kids think about...another one of those oversimplifications... ideological distortions that happen in every generation and adults are going along with...they’re scared to death of being called racist.” In this explanation, Peter resisted cut and dry determinations of race and voiced criticism about the way he feared race was getting taken up in simplistic and reductive ways that ignored other social forces shaping the world. While he did not explicitly say so, the subtext of this comment indicates a level of frustration with “woke” culture where the notion of being called racist supersedes any complex or critical thinking about race.

An alternative interpretation could be that in refusing to trace the more modern contours of race and racism with his students, instead opting to identify the core problem as various stakeholders’ different framings of racism and antiracism, Peter elided the paramount role of race in shaping societal conditions today. By gliding over how racial capitalism has shaped the modern world, and by asserting modern racialization as just one example of varying modes of oppression, one could interpret

Peter's evasion as downplaying the historical significance of race and therefore downplaying the role of racism.

In their specific and varied ways, each of the teachers detailed above drew on a deep well of historical knowledge, disciplinary lenses, and personal experiences to conceptualize the construction of race over time and, and in many cases, explicate that construction for their students.

Localized Narrations of Race & Limitations

In contrast to teachers with more broad-based and consistent narrations of race as a social construct, other teachers' descriptions of race were less explicit, at times featuring notes of bio-racial definitions, and bounded by their local context. For example, Stuart responded to questions about the foundations of race and racism in society by talking about his dissertation which studied the contradictions of Jefferson. He described writing about the people who knew Jefferson to see what they thought about his internal contradictions:

I realized they never escaped it. I call it kind of one of the defining questions of American history is that multiracial democracy, I'd say, is the biggest question mark we've had ever since then. So, the people I wrote about wanted to eliminate slavery, but they couldn't grapple with the idea of multiracial democracy...I just carry that strand really all the way through the present.

Stuart's explanation hearkens to a central question motivating his curriculum and pedagogy—the question of multiracial democracy, what it entails, and how to get

there, though his underlying beliefs about what constitutes race itself do not come through in this explanation. Stuart's emphasis on multiracialism and its role as the preeminent goal of democracy raise larger questions about the racial logics that "multiracialism" relies on and whether it presumes a view of racial groups as discrete and essential, or composed of an inborn set of traits. For many, especially social justice-oriented teachers, among their most prominent goals is to prepare students to live and participate in a multiracial democracy. Pragmatically, this makes a great deal of sense, given the very real effects of race in society and its material correspondences with democratic participation, socioeconomic status, and general societal well-being. Still, does relying on a fixed interpretation of race ultimately reify a bio-racial definition?

Stuart's emphasis on the challenges of establishing a multiracial democracy may also be informed by the space in which he was operating— he taught in a Southern city with one of the largest public monuments to lynching, in a private school that he described as a "white flight academy" who now "does their best" to bring in more diversity but whose students of color report to him that the "climate isn't always the greatest" and stands in stark contrast to the dilapidated public education system that operates concurrently. In his school, community, and state, the historically constructed Black-white binary has persisted and white people continue to have more determining power to this day. Given this context, Stuart's progressive insistence on equality and his presumptive logic of the naturalness or permanence of racial definitions made sense. For him, a multiracial democracy which corrected the race-

based power imbalances he regularly confronted, constituted what he considered to be the highest plane of social transformation.

Though quite different from Stuart's example, Arthur's narration of the role of race in history and society was also bound by his sociopolitical teaching context and in his case, focused on immigration patterns that have defined and continue to define his diverse New England city. He explained:

The foundations of race, I'm not sure how to respond to that...So where I teach...it's one of the most diverse communities...probably in the country. It's a gateway city. It has been since the 1840s, and it seems like every decade or so there's a new wave of people coming in... So, we have students in our public schools representing maybe about 70 countries...We've got over 100 languages spoken...to root it back to this idea of race, kids who grew up [here], they're used to being around other groups. But our city, if you look at the neighborhoods, there's the white wealthy neighborhood, there's the Cambodian American neighborhood, there's the Portuguese neighborhood...And this is how it's been for over a hundred years. [The city] has tried to address that with citywide schools to try to mix up the schools in the neighborhoods. But, you know, I mean, there's still a lot of work to be done there.

When asked about race, Arthur described the depth of diversity of his city and school population, and its persistent segregation keeping groups cordoned off from one

another. He later referenced the hostility that he has seen emerge from immigrant groups as new waves of immigration occur; explaining that “it’s like the last group in...doesn’t want another group to come behind them.”

In this explanation, Arthur’s narration of race drew upon notions of ethnicity and nationhood, which makes sense given his diverse school and community context. Framing questions of race in terms of ethnic dynamics risks leaving questions of power and history opaque, though in a later response, Arthur did reference the white elites who have long dominated city politics. Additionally, bounding racial categories to nation and ethnicity can also assume a fixed or essentialized quality that leaves the social construction of race unaddressed. Still, Arthur’s descriptions of race seemed to be concerned with the ways in which his students were racialized, the dynamics that then informed political dynamics in his city, and the ways in which their national identities collided with the tightly bound racial categories most prominent in the United States.

These diffuse expressions of what race is and how it shows up based on their specific contexts provide an important reminder about the ways in which racial understandings are contextual, messy, and situated in the practices of daily life. As Fields & Fields (2014) contended, ideology is not merely a set of attitudes that “people can ‘have’ as they have a cold,” but rather that “human beings live in human societies by negotiating a certain social terrain, whose map they keep alive in their minds of the collective, ritual repetition of the activities they must carry out in order to negotiate the terrain” (p. 135-136). Thus, these “muddled” narratives of race are

revealing in the ways in which they are imbricated with Stuart and Arthur's particularized contexts. In both cases, their racialized understandings are imbued with the meanings created by local context, serving an important reminder about the situatedness and constant re-inscription of race that occurs in society for, "if race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inherited it from our forebears of the seventeenth century, but because we continue to create it today" (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 146). More broadly, the muddled-ness of these racial explanations perhaps highlights Fields & Fields' (2014) larger point about race writ large, which is that it entails a set of "propositions that collapse into absurdity upon the slightest examination" (p. 119). Thus, perhaps these inconsistencies are quite logical given that rationality is at fundamental odds with conceptions of race anyway.

Nods Toward Bio-Racial Definitions

Though most teachers exhibited an understanding of race as constructed, in a few cases, teachers' racial reasoning continued to reify an understanding of race as natural or biologically informed. Fields & Fields (2014) described the idea of *race* as "the conception or the doctrine that nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from the members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank" (p. 16). By this telling, any description of race or racism that draws upon the innate equation of skin color to racial rank perpetuates this line of thinking, defining what Fields & Fields (2014) have termed bio-racism, which inscribes race as a biologically occurring phenomenon rather than a set of ideas that were created. In the space

below, I detail a few different examples of bio-racial understandings to demonstrate the variation of logics, even when teachers demonstrate a level of understanding of systemic racism.

To begin, Ursula, an 8th grade teacher in a conservative pocket of a Southwestern city, relied on a biological framing of race in her explanation of the concept of race for her students. She described how the topic comes up, explaining:

So how do they classify slaves? And what's the mulatto? And, you know, the blending of different races. So, it does come up in early American history because if you have one- sixteenth of a certain type of blood, then you are classified as this, and same thing with the Native American reservation system. If you are like 1/16 of a certain blood, then you are part of a tribe or you're not...it just stems from, you know, thousands of years, right, and how someone looked.

Ursula's explanation of race relied on an understanding of race determined by blood. She uses language like "blending," "blood," and "classify" to determine one's status as slave, Mulatto, or Native American and ended with an affirmation of race as based on "how someone looked," informed by "thousands of years." One interpretation of her invocation of inborn traits (e.g., blood), and in the assertion of race making over "thousands of years," could be that Ursula was demonstrating the arbitrariness of blood rules to show how race has been socio-politically constructed in service of white supremacist ideals of nation, borders, and colonialism. On the other

hand, she did not include any of those orienting views in her response. When asked about how she incorporated contemporary issues of race or racism into her curriculum, she responded with a discussion of the most recent presidential election and the fact that she taught in a conservative pocket. Later responses continued to avoid directly talking about race/ism even when I asked about Black Lives Matter more explicitly. These elisions led me to conclude that Ursula tended towards presenting views of race as fixed, seemingly permanent, and divorced from discussions of how institutional power invented race for the specific purpose of racism.

In another example, Maureen, who also taught in a Southwestern state, lamented kids' lack of understanding of the differences between race and ethnicity, raising questions of racial definition, explaining:

There are lots of races throughout history, there are lots of races currently, and not all are in conflict with one another... I think there has been conflict between races from the beginning of time. If you look back to the very earliest civilizations, I would say the Sumerians, and the beginning of the Babylonians and the Persians in the Fertile Crescent, you see this conflict, and I think sometimes race is used as an excuse for a conflict when it's something territorial.

In a logic similar to Ursula's, Maureen collapsed modern notions of race and racism with an ancient interpretation of race used as a stand-in for civilizations and/or

groups. In invoking an ancient lens and using ‘race’ as a stand-in for various ancient civilizations, Maureen illustrated an understanding of race as a phenomenon having existed throughout history, removing it from its contemporary construction and modern manifestations of racism. While one interpretation might resign this framing to an issue of nomenclature or point to a zoomed out historical understanding of race like that espoused by Peter, for example, in effect, this collapsing and assertion that “there’s been conflict between races since the beginning of time,” Maureen downplayed the seriousness of racism today and the important actions and processes that have entrenched racial hierarchies today. In doing so, she also depicted race as naturally occurring, rather than constructed designed to protect white supremacy.

Additionally, Maureen also introduced the notion of conflict in her explanation of race, arguing that not all races are in conflict with each other. This statement operates with an understanding of race and racism removed from the historical grounding of contemporary race as created to entrench and protect white supremacy via racism. In arguing that territory is often the impetus for racial conflict, Maureen put forth an idea that races are naturally occurring and exist on equal footing in terms of the power they exhort via “conflict.” This is divorced from a sociohistorical understanding of race. Later, Maureen complained about what she perceived to be as the exclusivity of the Black Lives Matter Movement, which could be interpreted as a nod towards her prior comments about racial conflict– in wondering aloud whether she would be accepted as a BLM ally as a white person, Maureen drew upon a discourse of reverse racism (Ansell, 2013), whereby she felt victimized and excluded

by the BLM.

Maureen further expounded upon the differences of race and ethnicity applied to the Native American context, explaining:

Native American is the race, it is not an ethnicity, it's a race... I spent 20 years among the Navajo. That's an ethnic group. It is different than Akima or Laguna. They have different religions; they have different languages. Now, they are still classified biologically as the race of Native Americans, and actually, race is used to determine their [federal] status, which is a certificate of Indian blood... And when you talk about the Black race, for example...are you talking about African-Americans in America? Are you talking about Africans from Africa? Are you talking about Northern Africans? I mean, there's huge distinctions. Those are ethnic groups; Black is a race, but it's not an ethnic group. An ethnic group involved so much more about geography and history and politics and religion, and traditions and customs....

In this explanation, Maureen drew stark contrasts between ethnicity and race. For her, ethnicity is imbued with geography, history, politics, religion, and other factors based on social formations, yet, she does not do the same level of defining of race, again asserting race a naturally occurring conglomerate group identity. Like Ursula, Maureen also pointed to the use of “Indian blood” as a means to determine federal status and described Native Americans as being “classified biologically” upon that basis. This explanation touches on the murkiness that accompanies federal

recognition of Native American status which largely rests on notions of “blood” and proven ancestry, and of race, writ large, as Fields & Fields (2014) have noted.

Maureen’s explanation showcases the ways in which a bio-racial stance operates both within her own explanation racializing Native Americans, and in terms of the ways in which bio-racial explanations are baked into federal policy and law.

Cathy, a high school teacher in a diverse school in a rural area of a Southern state, provided a different take on biracial explanations of race:

Race is a huge discussion all over the country; we don't see color... for some people that issue and that feeling like they're being judged by their color is always there for them, unfortunately.

Here, Cathy invoked a colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) to deny “seeing color,” despite her assertion that “race is a huge discussion” nationwide. Denying the importance of color here, however, does not do the work of dismantling the construct of race. Instead, it simply ignores the way race is operationalized to stratify and justify inequality. Moreover, in applying a skin-color only application of race, Cathy fell back on a biological understanding ignoring the social elements that construct race.

Without excavating its creation, race persists as an inborn, natural concept that inevitably justifies racism. Interestingly, however, bio-racial understandings of race did not necessarily preclude robust explanations of racism, even when teachers’ descriptions were slightly muddled, rested on inaccurate descriptions, or remained un-

excavated. In the next section, I explore the ways that teachers conceptualized racism and the forms that these ideas took. Ultimately, I wrestle with the ways that systemic explanations of racism still dislodged the concept of race, even when the fallacy of race remained un-penetrated.

Teachers' Conceptualizations and Teaching About Racism

Racism as Systemic

Most of the teachers in this study (80%) illustrated an understanding of racism as systemic and reported teaching about historical events that demonstrated racism as an institutionalized phenomenon that supported white supremacist structures. To do so, some teachers drew explicit distinctions for students between institutional and individualized interpretations of racism. Others used local examples to illustrate the way racism works to forestall equality. By contrast, 8 teachers (21%) taught about racism evasively, relied on individualized interpretations, or centered their own or their white students' feelings when teaching about racism.

To begin, some teachers explicitly sought to convey to their students that racism extended beyond what Nick, a teacher of predominantly students of color in a large metropolis in the Northeast, described as “burning crosses and hoods and over white supremacy.” He explained,

Of course, it includes that. It includes people where...there's a conscious prejudice and a conscious bias towards people of color and other groups. I try and shift away from that and into a more systemic view that this is something

that from the beginning of our country has impacted policies. It's impacted laws, it's impacted cultural institutions, entertainment, you name it...And it's not as overt as, let's say, a Klansman or something like that.

Similarly, William, a teacher in a small town in a rural area of a Midwestern state explained that he wants his students to understand

Why people are angry about George Floyd. You can't deny the impact of race on voting. You can't deny the impact of race on hiring. You can't deny the impact of race on wages. You can't deny the impact of race on housing. You can't deny the impact of race in the field of business in the corporate world. You just can't deny it. How could you talk about gerrymandering without talking about race? And we talk about gerrymandering a lot in civics. So again, you cannot talk about history, you can't talk about politics. You can't talk about geography without acknowledging and talking about race. It's impossible.

In both these examples, Nick and William highlighted a variety of systems through which racism operates: entertainment, voting, hiring, housing, wages, laws, and more. In another example of teaching racism systemically, Arthur, who taught a middle school social justice class, focused on police brutality— his students spent instructional time researching and discussing various instances of police brutality and murder across the country. He took care to connect class literature with those themes along with other racial justice topics. In his world history content, he centered

inquiries into how imperialism affected Africa and drew upon his students' lived experiences, some of whom were refugees from African countries, to personalize the topic.

Other teachers emphasized local examples of systemic racism to make systemic racism more recognizable for their students, especially white students who may not have otherwise been aware of white privilege or the effects of systemic racism in their own lives. For example, Delia taught a unit that included studying how the killing of bison during Westward expansion made Indigenous resistance more difficult and students explored how the flooding of a local dam harmed the local tribe.

Along similar lines, Kevin created an inquiry based on the history of his city, asking students to investigate how geography plays into race, using the example of the 1951 flood which destroyed the all-Blac park in the city. He explained:

It was underwater because it was near the bottom. It was the less desirable land, so it [the flood] destroys it. Given segregation at the time, separate but equal, the only option was to, now that that park is gone, is to integrate the parks, because there's nowhere left. So we talk about that and ... that leads into the discussion of how segregation worked and why communities are where they are and white flight and so on and so forth.

Olivia also taught her students about the ways that racism shaped where people live in her city:

We talk about redlining, and I pull up a map of [our city] in 1937...And I just

know this is in the New Deal, the HOLC (Homeowners Loan Corporation) that was doing the redlining. And I always say, I'm going to show you the map, but I don't even need to show you the map because you probably know where the red areas are and where the blue and green areas are... and then I pull the map up and they're like, we're blue. And I was like, yes, we are. And we talk about what does that mean and talking about how race has been defined and then how it has affected decisions from day one of this country, before this country was founded.

In these examples, teachers drew upon students' lived realities to underscore the ways that racism has shaped where they live, who they interact with, and why. Lessons like these surface phenomena that are otherwise hidden from view—forcing students to grapple with a racialized reality that they rarely have to confront in their everyday lives or that might be so normalized that they never questioned the historical antecedents that placed them in the classrooms and communities where they sit.

Even teachers who described evasive or opaque definitions of race still included curricular topics related to systemic racism. For example, Helen, who stated that she did not define race for her students, still included topics like search-and-seizure and stop-and-frisk policies in New York to demonstrate racial injustice; she also described teaching about systemic racism through lenses like education, college admissions, business practices, and Covid rates. In another example, Caden, who reductively described race as something imposed on you, in contrast to ethnicity as

something you choose, centered inquiries into systemic racism and white privilege throughout his ethnic studies and history courses, explaining, “There's been this trajectory of racism in the United States since its inception. And that's an essential if you're going to understand U.S. history, you need to understand.” He drew on events like the Pequot massacre; Jackson and the Trail of Tears; the Laramie Treaty reservation system; Native American boarding schools; and the Chinese Exclusion Act among many others to explore how systemic racism shaped the United States.

These examples demonstrate the ways in which teachers did not necessarily need to dislodge race as a concept for students while demystifying the processes through which racism functioned. Even though “race” as a fiction remained protected, Helen and Caden were still doing meaningful excavations of racism with their students.

Individualized Explanations of Racism

In contrast to the bulk of teachers in the study who centered explorations of racism in systemic, institutional ways, a smaller subset of teachers deployed individualized interpretations of racism that tended to center either their own feelings, or the feelings of their white students. In this section I highlight the patterns using the examples of Harold, who taught in a suburb outside of a large Midwestern city, and Maureen, who taught in a progressive charter school in a liberal city in the Southwest.

Harold

When asked about how he taught about racism to his students, Harold described starting his unit by sharing how he was personally affected by the murder of George

Floyd. His goal for sharing his own experience was getting students to open up their experiences:

I'm going to tell you a very selfish story if that's okay, please, please. So, my daughter was getting married in 2020. And so, my future son-in-law had the tuxedos, the suits, that kinda stuff at a local place downtown. Well, the George Floyd, death, murder, whatever, I'll let you define it. However, it almost ruined my daughter's wedding because of the riots that took place. We were not able to get [to the shop] until the very last minute for suits, the tuxedos, and so forth because the rioting destroyed the building where the suits and tuxedos were.

In this example, Harold described Floyd's murder as "it" and labeled the protests that emerged in response as "riots." In the missing subjects in his descriptions of the rioting that "took place," and "destroyed the building," Harold avoided assigning responsibility for Floyd's murder and erased the presence and motivations of the people involved in collective protest in Floyd's name, indicating a lapse of humanity and raising questions about his grasp of the larger historical significance of the George Floyd protests. Harold also framed the stakes of Floyd's murder in terms of his own personal inconvenience rather than drawing upon discourses that situated the event against the larger backdrop of systemic racism and anti-Blackness.

Harold also largely drew upon discourses of racism as individualized, identifiable through derogatory or hateful language, evidenced through the lack of representation

in positions of power including amongst students. He described his students of color sharing their own experiences of racism, citing,

Basically just racial slur type things. The n-word that some of my African-American students had been called in school. The social media posts that some of my Keren students have been subjected to. We also have a large Mexican-American population here. And many of those students talked about not feeling included in the activities at the high school. That it's, you know, it's all the white kids that become homecoming king and queen. And the other populations here are not being reflected.

Harold expressed regret about the experiences of his students of color and strived to create a haven for them in his class. Later, he mentioned his goal of teaching primarily white students that “there is white privilege” although he denied having a “specific unit” or “a lecture slide...that talks about white privilege.” Still, he described wanting his students to know “the reality is that for the longest time, minorities in the United States had been treated so poorly in that.” He encouraged his students to

Be active. Do something about it. Go talk to a student that is from Mexico. Go talk to an African American student, get to know them, be friends with them. Expand your horizons in college.

In these explanations, Harold displayed an incomplete understanding of racism

defined by minorities being treated badly. His recommendations for his white students seeking to remedy racism included talking to students from “Mexico” and making friends with an African American student. These examples both emphasized individual acts of kindness as a means to subvert racism.

Finally, Harold’s teaching of slavery centered the feelings of his students, seeking to get them to “feel calm, loose, “so that they can become “aware that this [slavery] is really a bad thing.” In his introductory lesson on slavery, he described using theater exercises to relax his students, setting up a simulative environment to convey a sense of seriousness for his students as he introduces them to the atrocities of slavery. He explained that “The first thing that we do is we walk with a purpose... And then I say, alright, find people that have the same shoe size as yourself,” then with the “same birthday numbers.” He had students act as each other’s mirror, pretend that one person is clay and the other is a sculptor, and then take on different roles (politician, ballerina, etc.). Next, he described bringing them “into my room and I make it as serious as I possibly can. And my first slide is about the Middle Passage.” He elaborated:

Now they have already read about the middle passage and some of the slave narratives beforehand, so they know the terrible stuff that's going on. And so, we look at that and we tried to imagine what it must have been like to be taken from your home, taken from your family, and then put into forced servitude for the rest of your life. And that's pretty, I think it's a pretty powerful thing. And then we move into obviously the nuts and bolts about slavery, the cotton

gin and that type of thing. So, I just think they have to be.... you just can't hit them over the head like here is slavery. Now, it's such a terrible thing that they have to be calm, loose, aware that this is really a bad thing.

In this rendition of slavery, Harold was sensitive to the horrors of slavery and thus sought to create a learning scenario where students understood the seriousness of the topic, but he did so through a host of theater games seemingly unrelated to enslavement. While he might have been motivated by Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed methodology (though he never said this), his priority on having his students be "loose" so that they can understand that "this is really a bad thing" signaled a lack of awareness on Harold's part about the triggering effects of simulations like these, especially for students of color, for whom this type of activity constitutes a type of violence.

In emphasizing how students might "feel" as they imagined being enslaved, Harold again centered the individualized, embodied feelings of students, rather than seeking to illuminate for his students the extensive network of policies and practices that led to and perpetuated the system of slavery. In these choices, Harold did little to imbue within students a systemic understanding of the way that racism works and the racialization upon which it relies. Still, those choices are in-line with Harold's own descriptions of his understandings of race and his limited applications of racism.

Maureen

Maureen's explanations of the role of racism in society drew upon a variety of

discourses including racism as individually enacted, downplaying the racial components of atrocities, reverse racism, and the “racial divide.” To begin, in some instances, she articulated a view of racism as limited to individual expressions of prejudice or hate. For example, of the role of racism in society, she explained, “Well, I think we need to address it. I don't think you can get anywhere by just calling people names, it doesn't go anywhere.” At other times, she narrated racism as acts by which “ancient kings would go in and wipe out an entire race,” elaborating how one can

Obviously take it up to more modern examples like Hitler and Stalin, and one of the things we tend to focus on is the Holocaust, which is horrific by all accounts, [but] if you look at the numbers, Stalin killed more people than Hitler. Hitler murdered over 5 million Jews as a race. But Stalin literally wiped out 20 million people in Ukraine and his own people, so that's one way to look at it.

Here, Maureen seemed to be defining racism by drawing a parallel between ancient kings wiping out races with Hitler's facilitation of the Holocaust. She went on to contrast Hitler's actions with Stalin's mass murdering of Ukrainians and Russians, the subtext being that Stalin killed more people than Hitler, though it remains unclear if she is making an argument that Stalin's actions were racialized or if she is using this fact to downplay Hitler's own acts of racism.

Along the lines of prior descriptions of racial conflict, in this case too, Maureen described racism as occurring between different races operating on an equal plane.

She asked, “How do you move forward to exist in a multicultural society where there is a lot of bad blood between races?” explaining:

There's a lot of historical... ‘You did this to my people.’ We see that here...because we have the Anglo, the Hispanic, and the Native Americans and yeah, the Anglos came in and wiped out the Native Americans with disease and destruction. The Spanish came in and wiped out the Native Americans. The Anglos came in and wiped out the Spanish.

Maureen’s telling of the historical dynamics in her state presupposed an equal balance of power among different racial groups. Missing from this telling of history was the understanding of the role of white supremacy in shaping each wave of colonization, and the power differential between the Native Americans and colonizers. While she noted at the end of her explanation that the “Anglos came in and wiped out the Spanish,” she did not include in explanation of the settler colonial reality that the settlers came to stay (Calderón, 2014). In this sense, for Maureen, all races were on the same footing, and all acts of colonization constituted the same type of racial violence. In this sense, Maureen neutralized the racial violence of settler colonialism and in doing so, drew upon a discourse that deracialized atrocities in lieu of the argument rooted in a discourse of the “racial divide,” which Fields and Fields (2014) described as an ideological principle whereby all parties are held equally responsible for racial violence, ignoring undergirding white supremacy that gives way to such violence.

In line with the above explanation, Maureen’s description of racism in the contemporary moment also reflected a “racial divide” discourse:

I think Black Lives Matter is really an interesting movement, and I'm curious to see where it goes from here, but how are they defining themselves?... How do they define themselves vis a vis other races?... And is it just for Blacks or am I... as a human being and supportive of them... can I be a part of that, even though I'm obviously not Black? And personally, our family was a slave-owning family back in Virginia in the 1700. Does that mean that that racism that appeared in the family stays with me, or can I be empathetic to their cause when I see justice denied?

In this explanation, Maureen pinned the impetus for addressing racism on the Black Lives Matter movement, conveying a message that BLM is racially exclusionary and that they, as an organization, are in the driver’s seat in terms of whether they will allow people of other races into their movement for racial justice. She speculated about whether she, as white person with a familial implication into slavery, would be welcomed into that group. This flip of the racial script—whereby the Black-led movement has determining power over white bodies—served as a straw-man argument that positioned Maureen as a powerless victim in this dynamic. In framing discussions of racism through “reverse racism” discourse (Ansell, 2013), Maureen again demonstrated a subscription to a racial ideology grounded in individual feelings (in this case, her own) whereby race is natural, inborn, and equally

powerfully embodied by all peoples, and ahistorical in terms of the systematic installation of white supremacy at every level of US society.

Synthesis and Further Questions

In this chapter, I outlined the variety of narrations that award-winning history teachers applied to race and racism, contemporarily and historically. In contrast to what I expected to find based on prior literature regarding teachers' understandings of race as biological, in this segment of teachers, the majority (56%) articulated a view of race as socially constructed. A subset of those teachers described teaching about the invention of race through their history content. These teachers used laws to demonstrate the hardening distinctions between white and Black over time, highlighted the inverse relationships to freedom for indentured servants and enslaved Africans, and demonstrated the legalized uses of sexual violence in perpetuating an enslaved body of workers. Other teachers emphasized the ways that race was operationalized to imbue certain bodies with inferiority to justify the monstrosity of enslavement. A few also co-located the construction of race with whiteness, showing how it protected a white supremacist system. Fields & Fields (2014) asserted that one of the central ways to push back against 'racecraft' is to restore to race its proper history (p. 121) and it is clear that this group of teachers' are making headway in doing just that, providing students with historically grounded explanations about what race is and how it came to be, revealing where the ideological meanings of race developed and how they were legislated to racializing effect.

Similarly, 30 out of the 39 teachers studied represented racism for their students

as systemically engrained and institutionally enforced. This again, was surprising given prior research showing that racism is often taught and understood as individualized acts of hate or personal animus embodied by accusations of individuals as racist (e.g., “Daniel was a racist,” Wills, 2019). By and large, however, the teachers in this study drew upon historical and contemporary events to teach their students about the ways in which racism has been embedded in systems since before the founding of the United States. Teachers touched on systems like redlining, police brutality and disparities in policing, wealth gaps, gerrymandering, the GI Bill, white privilege, inequities in the education, criminal justice, and banking systems. They also drew on historical events and phenomenon like Native boarding schools, Reconstruction, persistent lynching, states banning Black inhabitants (e.g., Oregon), the Chinese Exclusion Act, immigration restrictions, Japanese Internment, the Rwandan genocide, the Tulsa Race Massacre, the white exclusivity of 1950s suburbia, KKK/racial terror, and others. Teachers executed teaching racism as systemic at different levels and to different degrees— for some the notion of systemic racism was integral to their historical knowledge and for others, though they excavated and explained certain ideas reflective of institutional racial hierarchy, they also still voiced perspectives on race that were individualized and/or colorblind. Because this study solely explored teachers’ interview responses, the effects of their instruction cannot be known from this study. Still, many of the teachers in this study seemed to be working to rectify the public language of race with their students, illuminating the processes by which race was made, and the way that it manifests in

racist institutions that shape students' lived realities. In showcasing the intentional creation of racial ideas over time, these teachers were taking steps to puncture the fiction of race as real for their students.

By contrast, a smaller subset of teachers reified bio-racial definitions of race, drawing on either colorblind racial logics, and/or muddled explanations that ahistorically situated contemporary understandings of race as having spanned millennia with the same relationship to power. Some teachers' explanations of racism reduced it to interpersonal expressions or centered the feelings of those who were peripherally inconvenienced rather than acknowledging the depth of pain caused by what Fields & Fields (2014) describe as a "crime against humanity" (p. 101). Another teacher conflated various types of conflict with racial violence in ways that seemingly excused it and downplayed settler colonial violence as merely a normalized act that different races did to each other. In these ways and others, a few teachers ultimately protected racial categories as permanent and excused racism in their narrations of its existences.

Fields & Fields (2014) reminded us that "the first principle of racism is belief in race, even if the believer does not deduce from that belief that the member of a race should be enslaved or disenfranchised or shot on sight by trigger-happy police officers..." (p. 109) In this way, racism is kept alive via the belief and continual reliance on the ideology of race to explain social problems, to frame identities, and believe that is real. Ta-Nehisi Coates agreed that presuming race as a biological constant "annihilates history" (2014). In his book, *Between the World and Me*, he

poetically explained, “racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage of the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men. But race is the child of racism, not the father” (2015, p. 7). With this principle in mind, even the teachers who sophisticatedly represented racism as systemic did little to puncture its armor. By the same token, however, Fields & Fields (2014) also asserted that “No operation performed on the fiction can ever make headway against the crime. But the fiction is easier for well-meaning people to handle,” meaning that efforts to disrupt the fallacy (fiction) of race do not necessarily translate to the dismantling of racism. Based on this argument perhaps it is easier to stomach learning about race as a social construction than the true workings of racism. And yet, I am reluctant to discount the work of historical restoration that is happening on both sides of the coin—both in illuminating the creation of race and whiteness, and their imprint systematically over time. Fields & Fields (2014) underscored a critical historical truth:

The enslavement of Africans made possible the freedom of Europeans, and then cast a long shadow over subsequent history. Out of that process emerged an elaborate public language of “race” and “race relations” that disguised class inequality and, by the same stroke, impoverished Americans’ public language for addressing inequality (p. 112).

I believe that the teachers in this study who did refute bio-racial definitions and

relied on systemic definitions of racism were doing important work in administering for students a “public language,” heretofore impoverished by racial ideologies that mask the underlying reasons for inequality. In the next chapter, to further explore the nuances of ideological ruptures articulated by a portion of this study’s teachers, I focus on two teachers, Ronald and Elizabeth, whose racial understandings relied on competing ideological frameworks stitching together discordant pieces of historical knowledge. I use Philips (2011) theory of ‘ideology in pieces’ to explore these disjunctures in depth, seeking to ascertain the nuances of their ideological reasoning in order to further theorize the components that compose teachers’ racial ideologies more broadly.

Chapter 5: Racial Ideologies ‘In Pieces’: Ronald & Elizabeth

Note: segments of this chapter have been published in *Teaching Education* in March 2023.

Overview

As discussed in Chapter 4, a subset of the study’s teachers reflected multiple, and at times competing, discourses about race. This initial pattern was first evident in teachers’ responses to Likert-scale survey questions where about half of the teachers who responded to the survey were coded as ideologically inconsistent/ ideologies in pieces (n=23) (see Figure 4 for details). In some cases, teachers’ extended explanations of race and related concepts during their semi-structured interviews gave way to more ideological consistency, clarifying their interpretations. In other cases, teachers’ ideological inconsistencies became even more pronounced in their interviews, raising questions about the various discourses that characterized their racial sense-making.

In this chapter, I focus on two teachers who most clearly these types of demonstrated ideological inconsistencies to glean more insights into the elements that comprise teachers’ racial ideologies more broadly: Ronald, who taught in a mostly white small town in a rural part of a Republican-run, Midwestern state; and Elizabeth, who taught mostly white students in a suburban technology magnet school in a

diverse city in the Southeastern state also controlled by Republicans. Both Ronald and Elizabeth's survey responses were initially coded as "ideologically inconsistent," and their semi-structured interviews also reflected a complex mosaic of racial ideologies, though in very different ways. Ronald's discourse showcased the competing logics of multiculturalism and anti-Blackness. By contrast, Elizabeth's discourse reflected understandings of race as constructed, racism as real, and she expressed a facile commitment to antiracism. At the same time her pedagogical descriptions also reflected logics of race evasiveness and strategic silences on the workings of racism, most evident in a lesson where students explored the economic benefits of enslavement. To varying extents, Ronald and Elizabeth's racial ideologies were also informed by contextual constraints based on their states' legislative efforts to control "Critical Race Theory," which is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

I frame this chapter using Thomas Philip's (2011) theorization of 'ideology in pieces' to better understand how teachers' historical knowledge applications were inflected with racial ideologies. I begin by explicating Philip's (2011) theory of 'ideologies in pieces,' contextualized amidst larger theories of ideology and critical discourse. I follow with the cases of Ronald and Elizabeth, locating and analyzing the naturalized racial axioms, or racial commonsense, that undergirded their explanations of race and racism and their descriptions of their teaching. I end the chapter with a discussion of the implications of competing racial ideologies. Examining these two teachers' racial sensemaking in depth sheds light on some of the key components that compose ideologies writ large, grapples with why and how they might conflict, and

contemplates the broader impact of ideological inconsistencies on students.

Ideologies in pieces

In his theorization of ‘ideology in pieces,’ Philip (2011) combined Andrea di Sessa’s (1988) theory of ‘knowledge in pieces’— which examines how individuals’ component pieces of knowledge (in his case, about physics) do not necessarily indicate comprehensive and systemic understanding—with Stuart Hall’s (1996) work on ideology, which he defined as the “mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 26). Hall understood that topics like race are culturally constructed and socially situated and given this, he described race as a “floating signifier,” acquiring different meanings depending on circumstances and contexts. Because of its ever-changing meanings, when it comes to knowledge construction about sociocultural topics, it is necessary to “attend to the multiplicity of meanings with which we make sense of society” (Philip, 2011, p. 327). Importantly, history teachers deploy historical knowledge in particular ways with the effect of either reinforcing or disrupting narratives about race and related concepts for their students. In combining these two ideas—the cognitive elements of knowledge construction with the ideological elements about race/racism—Philip (2011) captured the complex sensemaking accompanying teachers’ knowledge construction of race/racism demonstrating how historical knowledge is inflected with naturalized racial axioms or, racial commonsense.

From a perspective more focused on the role of language in both representing and constructing the world through social practices that are both ideologically inflected with and protective of particular power arrangements, Fairclough (1989) defined ideology as the ‘institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking’ which ‘often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations’ (p. 33). These practices, he continued, ‘appear to be universal and commonsensical [and] can often be shown to originate in the dominant class or the dominant block, and to have become naturalized’ (p. 33). Taking a Gramscian (1975) view, Fairclough (1989) argued that ideology is ‘most effective when its workings are least visible’ (p. 85). This explanation of language indicates a belief that power is dialogic and that contestations occur at the discursive level, through language use. Because the data informing this chapter relied solely on teacher’s discursive descriptions of their ideas about race and their pedagogical practices, a focus on the work performed via discourse enables the surfacing of *naturalized racial axioms* e.g., the racial commonsense embedded in and undergirding of Ronald and Elizabeth’s interviews, with an eye towards the larger ramifications for power relations that these understandings uphold.

The case of Ronald

Ronald taught middle and high school World and American history in a small town in the Midwest. He reported his school demographics to be about 90% white. Prior to obtaining his current post, he had served in the Air Force and worked in the mortgage industry which he left following the subprime mortgage crisis where he

‘made buckets of money.’ He had traveled to many countries and emphasized global connection as a key aspect of his pedagogy, incorporating his relationships with international teachers into his classroom curriculum. He routinely scheduled virtual conversations between his students and those in other parts of the world. Making learning fun was one of his central goals for teaching.

In the space below I describe the competing naturalized racial axioms that populated Ronald’s narrations of race and related concepts, particularly as connected to his teaching. These naturalized racial axioms included seeing color, meritocracy, anti-Blackness, multiculturalism, and catering to whiteness. While Ronald’s discourse around race featured these competing racial logics, there were also some consistencies throughout: pervasive anti-Blackness and an understanding of race as identity-based, rather than systematically constructed. These two persistent axioms made it difficult for more antiracist racial axioms to shift the overarching white supremacist messages about race and racism conveyed to his students.

Seeing Color & Racial Essentialization

An important piece of Ronald’s racial ideology held that he was aware of the color of his students. When asked about whether he considered himself to be an antiracist educator, Ronald replied, ‘I think a better question would be, do you see color in your classroom? Because the answer should always be yes.’ He elaborated:

The Black kid in your classroom is going to be looking at the world different than a white kid in your classroom, that a Latino is going to look in your

classroom different than an Asian American is going to look into your classroom... you have to identify those kids and make sure that they are going to get a perspective of history that they can identify with...

For Ronald, seeing the race of his students meant catering his curriculum to those in the room drew upon the discourse of representation in history curriculum mattering for students' self-esteem and well-being. This sentiment is reflective of an ideology that has emerged in response to what Bonilla-Silva (2003) referred to as era of colorblind racism which posited that racism was best dealt with by regarding everyone equally, ignoring racial differences, and effectively pretending to ignore the real and experienced facts of racialization for people of color. By contrast, Ronald, in this statement, acknowledged that racialized groups have different experiences and epistemologies, and that curriculum should match the students' identities. He followed by describing how if he had Black students in his classroom, his curriculum would be different and his responsibility to teach different perspectives in his course content. He explained,

I have a responsibility to teach different perspectives of the world. From different races, from different colors, from the perspective of women... It would be a disservice to my students. I don't do that because they're white. I just do it because it's the right thing to do...I modify my curriculum. If there are a lot more African Americans in my classroom, most definitely I would. Because you want to teach things that your kids can identify with...it's my job

to show different perspectives.

This explanation contains competing racial logics. The first logic holds that diverse perspectives are important regardless of the students in the room because ‘it’s the right thing to do.’ The second logic indicates an alternative position—that the students in the room should determine curricular modification. This second logic—that curriculum should be modified depending on who is in the room— also came up later in the interview where he further elaborated:

Well, if I had a lot more African American kids, I’m going to intertwine a lot more stories about great African Americans in the narrative. Because that’s who I’m teaching. I taught at a trade school where 95% of my kids were African American. 25% of them were convicted felons that were out now trying to rebuild their lives. My lessons were different because that’s who I was teaching to.

In this excerpt, Ronald affirmed the second logic— that he taught his African American students differently based on their histories and experiences. One might describe the practice of modifying one’s curriculum to fit the student in the classroom as culturally relevant pedagogy, raising questions about relevance for whom. Does this indicate that because Ronald’s students were predominantly white, he catered his curriculum to their white identities leaving out Black history because it does not match the identities of students in the room? In what ways might revising curriculum to match students’ identity positions protect particular understandings about who

figures into history and why? While representation is important, are there other considerations when it comes to goals of history and the need for white students to also understand Black history, especially from a systemic perspective. These contradictory logics— of cultural relevancy and multiple perspectives— surface questions about Ronald’s commitments and about the effects of not highlighting Black histories for both white and non-white students.

Meritocracy, Anti-Blackness, and Individualizing Race

On multiple occasions, Ronald invoked merit in conversations about race and racism to affirm the humanity of nonwhite people. For example, Ronald told a story about his father, detailing his own racial ideology in pieces:

I would say that my dad, even though he definitely has his views on race, also has his views on merit. He was the first guy to walk across the cafeteria and sit with Black men, but then turn around and call them N words right after that.

In this excerpt, Ronald used merit as a stand-in for talking about how his father negotiated race relations demonstrating how his dad used ‘merit’ as a marker for whether to associate with Black men, which stood in contrast to his ‘views on race,’ i.e., calling them ‘N words.’ Later in the same response, Ronald again invoked meritocracy again as connected to race when talking about his father:

My dad was more of a meritocracy kind of guy. But then when you saw

African Americans destroying their community, or you'll have riots or shootings or things like that, then the stereotypes kind of come out as a result of that.

In this statement, Ronald again positioned merit against racist stereotypes that assert Black people as responsible for ‘destroying their community’ and ‘riots’ and ‘shootings.’ In both examples above, merit functions as permission structure that excused or downplayed his father’s racism. This statement also highlights another naturalized racial axiom for Ronald— racism as individualized—which placed responsibility for community destruction on African American communities, whom he also blames for creating stereotypes. Ronald then connected his father’s experiences with his own life stating, “my dad had headed up a general contracting company, hired a Vietnam veteran who was a black guy... I still know him. He's a good dude. And he's a Black dude, you know?” In this final response, the descriptor of ‘good’ seemed to serve as an antidote to ‘Black,’ providing an alibi proving to Ronald that he was not racist (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013), or in an alternate interpretation, distinguished this particular family friend as different from other Black men.

Each of these examples hosted an underlying anti-Black logic that reinforced the idea of merit as a remedy for non-whiteness. Ronald confirmed this with a remark about being antiracist which also shed light on Ronald’s overarching understanding of what constitutes racism:

So, you know, am I antiracist? Well, yeah, I feel kids should be judged on their merit, you know? But then you say in the same breath, you've got to accept who they are. You have to identify, yeah, that's a Black kid. Yeah, that's an Asian kid. And to deny that is racist in itself.

Here, Ronald again invoked merit— this time as the determiner of an antiracist educator. The connection between merit and his view of antiracism implied that equity is contingent on how 'deserving' students are rather than a recognition of the role that race and racism play in preserving white supremacist power arrangements detrimental to people of color. In this explanation, Ronald again provided an example of his definition of racism as amounting to individual behaviors and feelings, fitting squarely with notions of meritocracy, which also places individuals as responsible for correcting their social circumstances through hard work while failing to account for the ways that inequalities are systemic.

In addition to individualizing race, Ronald also essentialized racial groups and downplayed the systemic elements of racism in his explanation about the role that race plays in society, which he explained:

Race is predominant in our society right now. What we're experiencing right now is a massive cultural shift that's making a whole lot of people uncomfortable. And because of that, now people are doing what they always do when race makes you uncomfortable. Now all of a sudden, they start closing ranks around their own people. And that's African Americans closing

ranks around African Americans. It's Latina Latinx people closing ranks around them, it's white people closing ranks around them. All right. And what we're looking for here is we're looking for the worst in all these different races.

This explanation displayed an understanding of racism defined by racial groups 'closing ranks,' by which Ronald seemed to mean that racial groups are becoming increasingly distrustful of those outside of their own racial identity. Though he did not specify the racial identities of 'a whole lot of people,' experiencing discomfort with the 'massive cultural shift,' the subtext is that America is becoming less white. In characterizing race as 'predominant' and equally applied/experienced, Ronald, like Maureen in the prior chapter, drew upon a "racial divide" discourse, drawing a false equivalency that downplayed the power imbalance stemming from white supremacy and ignored historical and contemporary systemic violence wrought against people of color. For Ronald, racism was about individuals in groups 'looking for the worst,' in other groups. Limiting discussion of racism to questions of people's comfort denies the actual harm caused by racism.

In these above examples, Ronald affirmed his view of himself as an antiracist educator and that acknowledging students' racial identities is an important part of antiracist teaching. Yet, Ronald also essentialized racial groups, individualized racism, and invoked merit as the remedy for racism. In these examples, though Ronald co-located seemingly oppositional concepts, (e.g., antiracism and merit; merit & racism; good & Black etc.), ultimately his naturalized racial axioms present as

consistent, undergirded by a pronounced anti-Blackness that upheld white supremacist logics. Importantly, Ronald's explanations of racism and antiracism remain tethered to students' individual identities and group perspectives via representation, and he did not bring up a systemic or structural analysis of how racism functions.

Strategic Invocations of 'Diversity'

Ronald prided himself on teaching his students to think beyond their US-centric perspectives and emphasized learning about different countries, cultures, and religion in his world history curriculum, which he claimed to be transformative for his small-town midwestern students. One of his principal teaching goals was to foster global connections and thus he placed a huge curricular emphasis on facilitating relationships between his students and students around the globe in order to show kids, 'We aren't the only people in the world, these English-speaking white people. There are a lot of different people out there.' To demonstrate the powerful learning experiences brokered by cross-cultural communication, Ronald described one example where he negotiated his students' anti-immigrant attitudes by having them talk to students from Mexico. Prior to their conversation, his students reported being excited to tell the Mexican students that they wanted to 'build the wall.' Yet these expectations were squashed when the Mexican students described living in million-dollar apartments, defying his students' preconceived stereotypes linking Mexico with poverty. When asked why they did not mention building the wall in the actual conversation, one of his students responded, 'I didn't really want to offend my new

friends.’ In this example and others, Ronald described how cross-cultural connection disrupted his students’ American-centric, and at times, racist stereotypes by having them forge meaningful connections with students with different life experiences.

While of course, challenging students’ stereotypes is important, it also feels necessary to trouble the fact that Ronald did not express taking issue with his students’ initial desire to invoke racist rhetoric with their new acquaintances. Imagine an alternate scenario with non-millionaire Mexican students or those more demographically befitting of Ronald’s students’ stereotypes. What if Ronald’s students did begin a cross-cultural dialogue with hateful language? His silence on students’ social class elitism was telling in terms of Ronald’s own ideological commitments, raising questions about who he would be willing to protect and to what extent.

Ronald touted celebrating diverse perspectives a pillar of his curriculum, yet he was also mindful of the comfort level of his white, conservative community, which he understood to be a delicate, easily upset balance. He talked about threading this needle carefully because of the trust he had established with his community during his tenure at the school. Of his school’s community, he noted, ‘we have a lot of deep French and German roots here...’ explaining while that his community might be fine with having students talk to other students in Morocco during their ‘Art in Islam’ unit, he was also ‘very aware of what my community can tolerate,’ elaborating:

So, to introduce race, I don't want to say that it's tricky, but you also have to understand the community that you live in...If I start singing the Black

national anthem at the beginning of school, and I start talking about Hinduism and Buddhism, where it becomes more than just historical, and I cross that line, I'll get fired. What teachers forget is you have a community that is going to be tolerant to a degree.

The need to be strategic regarding the constraints dictated by his largely white community meant that Ronald's efforts to integrate diverse perspectives into his curriculum were limited by what he perceived to be the degree to which his community could tolerate diversity. Along similar lines, Ronald discussed wanting to incorporate materials from the 1619 Project but being unable to, explaining that its reputation had been 'poisoned,' a nod to the ways that the project had been politicized, though he did not explicate on who was to blame for that fact. He described 'people's' fears that history as they know it was going to be replaced by a 'slavery perspective,' elaborating:

You got all of these people now that are starting to close ranks...Now you're saying we're going to take away the history...we're taking it away. Whoa, you can't do that. You're not going to teach George Washington anymore. You're not going to teach Abraham Lincoln anymore... We're closing ranks. All right. And that's what's happening. So, I'm not hitting CRT or 1619 Project because I've already diversified my curriculum that fits my community's needs.

In this explanation Ronald described 'people closing ranks' based on a manufactured

fear that traditional history would be replaced by ‘slavery perspective.’ Though he did not explicitly say ‘white,’ his identifying of deep “French and German roots,”—a euphemism for white people— evoked a subtext of white people’s fears, particularly evident in his use of ‘we’ when talking about closing ranks. And his use of the term “slavery perspective,” evinced a sense of disparagement about what that might entail. This example highlights the competing logics that informed his decision making regarding what topics to incorporate in his teaching; while Ronald may have wanted to include the 1619 Project, ultimately, he balked at including those more critical pieces, asserting that he had already diversified his curriculum sufficiently for his white community. Ultimately, Ronald’s curricular choices prioritized what he perceived to be the needs and feelings of the white status quo.

Disrupting & Catering to Whiteness

Ronald’s discussion of how he approached teaching about the history of white supremacy also contained multiple competing logics, some of which disrupted hegemonic whiteness and others which reflected and reified white supremacist perspectives in order to cater to his white community. In an example of how Ronald disrupted hegemonic whiteness, he described teaching his students that ‘Romans were not really white people,’ showcasing for his students the ways that modern ideas of whiteness did not apply in the medieval history that he was teaching them, a point reflective of Hall’s (1987) view of race as a floating signifier, taking on different meanings at different times, or in the case of Rome, Greece, and Turkey simply did not compute. In the same response, Ronald also described teaching his students that

Jesus was not white. He explained:

Our next unit in Christianity, I'll show them what we think Jesus really looked like. And boy, that really surprises them. All right. But I don't do that as a shock value. I just say, hey, listen, we just figure, you know, a 30-year-old man in Galilee around this time. This is what we think he looks like...

In this segment, Ronald punctured a traditional, white-centered ideal of Jesus for students, showing them that based on the location where he supposedly lived, he would not have been considered white.

In another example, Ronald's conveyed discourses about whiteness were a bit more muddled. When asked whether he teaches about the history of white supremacy, he replied:

1. No, I don't see any reason to. You've got to remember Italians used to be looked down
2. upon. Portuguese used to be looked down upon. They're pretty white. They're pretty much
3. white people...But there was a time when you didn't want Portuguese servants working in
4. your house. I teach lessons in American history... we talk about NINA: No Irish need
5. apply. So, we talk about the Irish. You know, they're as white as me and you...I want to
6. show kids that we aren't the only people in the world, these English-speaking white
7. people. There are a lot of different people out there. And so, are they supreme because
8. they're white? No, they're supreme...because of technology, because of innovation. How
9. do you conquer all of India, as you as the British did? They did it by, you know, playing
10. one off the other. They did that all over the world. You know, they're pretty

smart about

11. that. But no, I don't teach it from a white supremacy perspective.

Within this section, Ronald first denied teaching about the history of white supremacy (Line 1) yet followed by detailing the history of whiteness as it has changed over time (Lines 1- 5). He next asserted his goal of decentering whiteness for his students (Lines 5-7) and then provided a defense of colonization and white supremacy arguing that the British are ‘pretty smart,’ showcasing a white supremacist perspective (Lines 7-11) despite denying doing so in his concluding sentence (Line 11). This passage also illustrates how history teaching can be inflected with teachers’ beliefs and underlying racial ideologies– in this case, Ronald’s discussion of the historical enlargement of white identities was removed from a larger discussion of the power that whiteness inscribes. Even further, his defense of colonization, raising the fact that the British were ‘pretty smart’ effectively absolved white supremacy of its teeth. While this excerpt seemingly contains a multitude of competing racial axioms circulating, conveying a muddled message about the role and history of whiteness, ultimately Ronald’s discourse reinforced white supremacist logics.

Making Sense of Ronald’s Discourse

In describing his fathers’ contradictions when it came to his interactions with Black colleagues, Ronald remarked, ‘there’s no such thing as a clean line.’ That sentiment resonated throughout Ronald’s reflections on race in both his survey responses and interview. In this study, Ronald talked about the importance of seeing color *and* essentialized the experiences of racial groups; he claimed to be antiracist

and reified a merit-based, individualized understanding of racism laden with anti-Black stereotypes. He talked about valuing diversity *and* staved off more critical discussions of diversity. Ronald asserted whiteness as the norm *and* punctured an idea of Jesus as white. He taught about the history of whiteness (though denied doing so) *and* sought to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Ronald advised colleagues on how to do DEI work across the fraught political terrain of his state in ways that he felt were acceptable across urban and rural communities, *and* at the same time, he spoon-fed palatable diversity curriculum in ways that protected the comfort of his white community and himself.

Ronald's unique and complicated deployment of racial logics had to do with his own racial identity formation (e.g. being steeped in meritocratic, anti-Black rhetoric when growing up), his conservative and white community context that made overt and frank discussions of race risky and politically unpalatable; and his own epistemological stances on history and race (e.g. not subscribing to a systemic interpretation of racism; emphasizing global connection; believing that he should be moderate in his role). His discursive representations of what and how he teaches about race and racism also surface questions about Ronald's historical knowledge regarding race, racism, white supremacy, and more. In what ways were Ronald's curricular and pedagogical choices intentional and strategic and in what ways were they spurred by racial illiteracy and/or ignorance? Regardless, each of these components played a role in the way that Ronald conceived of and taught about race, racism, and whiteness in his classroom.

The Case of Elizabeth

Elizabeth taught high school history in STEM magnet school in a suburban area of a diverse Southeastern state. Her student body was predominantly white and male student body, whom she described as increasingly liberal. At multiple points she referenced how much her students pushed her own thinking about race, racism, and other social justice issues. At the same time, Elizabeth described being very constrained by her state's political climate, which had passed divisive concepts legislation, and on multiple occasions referenced the rules imposed by her state's scope and sequence, or other curricular parameters which bounded what she felt like she could teach. When asked about how she teaches about race and racism, she replied, "Well, I used to love the 1619 project, but that just got banned... so I can't use that anymore." At times she reflected an unwillingness to go beyond these state-imposed limits, and at other times, she took risks.

Like Ronald, Elizabeth's racial axioms also operated in pieces. In some ways, Elizabeth reflected typical progressive stances, acknowledging that race was constructed, that racism is real, and voicing a commitment to antiracism. At the same time, the level of constraint imposed by her state's political context coupled with her own vague explanations of race-related issues made her discourse a bit more muddled. Finally, Elizabeth's decision to flout state restrictions in order to have her students grapple with the economic benefits of slavery raised additional questions about her commitment to antiracism and the extent to which legislative constraints actually shaped her teaching trajectory, or rather, gave her permission to maintain the

status quo. These complexities are described in more depth below.

Progressive Racial Axioms

Elizabeth acknowledged race as socially constructed and reflected on the realness of racism, both interpersonally and systemically, examples from witnessing racial profiling as a teen and teaching about the whiteness of 1950s suburbia, a nod to a systemic discussion of racism related to housing. At the same time, Elizabeth's explication of these concepts often lacked detail, and at times conflated different historical moments, which made her knowledge about race and related concepts hard to pinpoint.

To begin, Elizabeth described her teaching philosophy as trying to include as many perspectives as possible to complicate the narratives of American exceptionalism which remain entrenched in many views of history teaching, explaining:

Especially here...where they're banning teaching of certain ideologies and theories because it looks quote, unquote bad for the United States...I think that it's totally our duty and our service to be able to provide perspectives and allow students the opportunity to explore two sides to a story, to kind of figure out for themselves what they interpret or believe to be as true.

In this description, Elizabeth made an implicit critique of her state's political/governmental choices regarding the banning of certain ideologies, and instead insisted that she believed history teachers should provide multiple

perspectives so that students can think for themselves. Notably, this explanation revealed some of Elizabeth's disciplinary beliefs about the role of history as about providing "two sides to a story," which she took up in ways that ended up working against her antiracist agenda, explored later in the chapter and I further elaborate on the ways that the disciplinary notion of "multiple perspectives" can go awry in Chapter 7.

Additionally, Elizabeth recognized the historical and social construction of race, acknowledging that the creation of race did not always have to do with skin color: "We talk a lot about how initially it didn't really have to do like race and skin color and ethnic background are like all different things. Whereas now most people see them as the same thing." She elaborated:

We talk about the foundation of socioeconomic class systems, especially with the Spanish *encomienda* systems, just how that evolved over time into what we now understand present-day as race or even racism.

In this description Elizabeth referenced the evolution of race over time, and the connections between race and socioeconomics— perhaps a nod to racial capitalism— in her discussion of the *encomienda* system. Later in the explanation, Elizabeth described the role of race in society today, explaining:

Because it plays such a big role, it's important to always mention that evolving idea of race and the construct of racism in history in the different time periods that we're talking about. Especially teaching American history because so

much of it is based on social perceptions in each era. So again, just trying to mention perspectives and as many continuities and changes over time as possible.

On the one hand, Elizabeth's narration did point to some important historical truths about race—that it was created, that it was bound up in capitalism, and that is contextual, evolving based on time and place. On the other hand, Elizabeth's explicit understandings of both race and racism remained opaque. While she used the framing of “construct” to talk about race earlier in her description, here, she used it to talk about racism as a construct, conflating race and racism in ways that risked masking the reality of racism. The lack of substantive details about its “big role,” and “the social perceptions in each era” leave the extent of Elizabeth's comprehensive racial knowledge little understood.

And, as with her reference “two sides to every story,” in an earlier quote, here, Elizabeth also drew on disciplinary terms like “continuity and changes over time,” and again invoked “perspective” as a key part of teaching about race and racism, though one wonders whether and how the reliance on these disciplinary schemas ends up neutering more complex and/or historically informed inquiries into evolving ideas of race and different types of racism.

In her interview, Elizabeth was adamant in her conviction that racism is real, describing her initial realization as a teenager while watching Black friends be racially profiled at the mall. She explained,

I was on the girls basketball team and we hung out with the boys basketball team a lot and a lot of the members of the boys basketball team or African American. And I was 16 years old. We were at our local mall and one of the security guards was following us around and I was like, this has never happened before, I go to the mall all the time. I never see security. But every time we turned a corner, we saw the same security guard. And I was like, holy crap, this is because we are with a group of Back boys. And that was the first time that I was like, wow, this is really a thing.

In this excerpt, Elizabeth connected what she had seen on TV and movies about racial profiling with what she witnessed in real life, asserting, “holy crap, this is actually real.” She described this moment as her first “wakeup call,” about the way that race shapes peoples’ lives differently and also in stark contrast to her “very stereotypical white girl” upbringing. Embedded in this self-description is Elizabeth’s own consciousness about her own racialization, noting the ways in which she embodied white, American privilege:

We were upper middle-class, lived in a very nice neighborhood...I had every opportunity imaginable in public schools. I went to college on two different scholarships...so, I never had to worry about my education in any way, shape, or form...So sometimes I need to remember that there are people that do [struggle] and have a little grace in that as well.

Beyond talking about her own white racial identity, this explanation also showcases

an understanding of the privileges afforded by whiteness. Though not explicit, in describing her nice neighborhood, access to opportunity in public schools, and debt-free college, Elizabeth exhibited a systemic understanding of the role of race in shaping one's life on many levels.

Elizabeth also described teaching about whiteness to her largely white student population. She explained how she teaches about white supremacy not only in the KKK but also in terms of white suburbia of the 1950s.

One of the times that I talk about whiteness in general, that they [students] are always a little bit surprised about is talking about the rise of suburbia in the 1950s and what life was like in the suburbs for the quote, unquote, ideal nuclear family during the Cold War. And how essentially all minority groups, not just African American, but all minority groups were really kind of pushed to the side during this time period. And it was all about white America and the celebration of white America. So that always kind of hits them in the gut when we talk about like this is the booming economy and all of this growth and all this great stuff. But only if you were white.

Although lacking details, here Elizabeth conveys a systemic account of the ways in which whiteness shaped the makeup of the suburbs and the narrative of progressive growth that tends to characterize the 1950s. She explained how learning about white privileges “hits [her students] in the gut,” and nods towards white exclusionary tactics via housing discrimination including white flight, redlining, and the whiteness of the

“ideal nuclear” family.

Elizabeth also described teaching about racism in “a lot of different areas throughout the curriculum,” though she couched this by explaining that she does more with the AP students than honors, because the curriculum allows for a “little more leniency.” Some of the historical events/examples of racism in her curriculum included:

The African slave trade, the invention of the cotton gin. We talk a lot about race as the kind of really driving into the institution of slavery when we talk about the advent of the cotton gin. Obviously, Civil War, Jim Crow. We talk about Native American assimilation. We talk about nativist sentiment with the onset of immigrants in the 1920s. We talk about Japanese American internment.

In this description, like others discussed in Chapter 4, Elizabeth referenced the invention of race as connected to and driving the institution of slavery, though she located this development not with race itself, but with the invention of the cotton gin. She also offered an expansive view of racism, encompassing Native Americans, Japanese American Internment, and the nativist sentiments that animated the 1920s, yet none of these events are fleshed out, and so details about her approach, framing and historical knowledge remain opaque. In sum, although Elizabeth reflected a somewhat critical stance on race, acknowledging its constructed-ness; validating that racism is real, and in her more or less explicit recognition of what it means to be

racialized as white, the vagaries of her descriptions raise questions about Elizabeth's knowledge and deployment of racial ideologies in her teaching. In the next section, I home in on certain points of evasion whereby Elizabeth downplayed the role of racism in her curriculum, invoked silences, and vacillatingly used political constraints as an excuse in ways that protected the status quo.

Race Evasion

Despite her convictions that racism is real and her view of self as an anti-racist teacher, Elizabeth frequently expressed racial axioms that conveyed a superficial understanding of racism or downplayed it in her curricular choices. To begin, Elizabeth's most robust description of racism pertained to the politics of representation and contentions regarding what to call certain groups. She explained becoming more conscious of the "verbiage" that she used in her curriculum after a student raised a question about what to call Indigenous peoples:

I used to love using the series *America, The Story of Us*. But more recently, we were having conversations in class and one of my students asked me a great question. And it's gotten me really thinking about not using that source anymore. She asked, why do the commentators refer to Native Americans as Indians? They were Native American, they weren't Indian. And why don't they have representation of minorities as the experts talking about topics? Why are they only white professors? Or if they do have minorities, why is it people like John Legend, not someone who's an

actual expert in the field?

Here, Elizabeth ruminated on various racial questions about what to call Indigenous peoples (Native American, Indian, etc.) and the overrepresentation of white professionals and “experts” in sources in contradistinction to the use of Black celebrities who may not have the same level of academic credentials or expertise (though notably, John Legend has a long record of racial justice activism). In these questions, Elizabeth touched on important manifestations of racism—the power of naming, the operationalization of experts, and issues of representation of people of color (or lack thereof). And yet, beyond the simple question of naming (which Indigenous people have specific preferences about, though Indian is often used interchangeably with Native American and other terms), Elizabeth also exuded a racial naïveté, reducing the expanse of racism and settler colonialism to simplified symptoms of racism rather than grasping the larger system (or set of interlocking systems) at play.

The incompleteness of her racial understandings was also evident in her explanations of antiracism. When asked about whether she considered herself to be antiracist, Elizabeth affirmed her view of self as antiracist, explaining her goals of staying “as neutral as possible” while also “not being afraid to look at the “bad and the ugly”:

I think that unintentionally most of my teaching is anti-racist because it's about perspective. And so, when you're looking at as many perspectives as we

look out in my class, you are looking at the bad and the ugly. So, I guess, yes, I would consider myself an antiracist teacher. And I think that one of the things that we need to do in education in general is to not be afraid of looking at the bad and the ugly. A lot of times educators just want to look at the, this is our great history and this is the good stuff that we did. Isn't this amazing? But we wouldn't really have the amazing without the bad and the ugly.

Here Elizabeth connected antiracism as something that could be done neutrally and “unintentionally” through “perspective.” While indirect, this description connotes a sense of racism as easily fixed, accomplishable simply by “looking at the bad.” When asked about the ugly things she taught about, Elizabeth largely repeated the same events she had previously listed, this time omitting any reference to enslavement and the civil rights movement, and instead highlighting the suppression of “anti-government antiwar messages” during WWI that limited the freedom of Speech. Out of all the “ugly” historical events that Elizabeth might have touched on, her silence on any example of Black racialized terror is notable.

Curricular Downplaying of Racism

Race evasion was evident in Elizabeth’s descriptions of her curriculum and pedagogical choices, which, like above, tended to downplay the atrocities of racism, and at times, drew on state-level legislative constraints to explain her choices for teaching (and not teaching) particular topics. In one example, Elizabeth described scaring students through a test-taking simulation as part of a lesson on the literacy

tests characteristic of the Jim Crow South before and during the civil rights movement. She described her plans to teach this lesson this year asserting that it “technically” followed the standards, recounting:

As soon as they walk in the room, [I] yell at them, have them throw their bags on the floor, take out a pencil. Here's a test. And this test is going to determine whether you pass or fail the class...I break their pencils, like just really scare the living crap out of them. And then after it's over, we do like, how did that make you feel? And then how is this related to what we're learning about the literacy tests in the South for voter registration? It's a very impactful lesson, it really gets them to understand the seriousness and severity of the need for voter registration changes.

In this simulation, Elizabeth used a reenactment to convey the “seriousness” and “severity” of the need for “voter registration changes” but her method of breaking pencils and yelling at her students also seemed to have the converse effect of make light of the issue (see Drake (2008) for the contentions regarding historical simulations). Moreover, even in her naming of the issue as “voter registration” and “voter registration changes,” Elizabeth conveyed an evasive message in defining the problems she was attempting to teach her students about, namely that it was about registration, rather than a more direct term that more clearly defined the problem (e.g., voter suppression, which more directly indicts the actors preventing people from voting). By avoiding naming the perpetrators of voter suppression, she

effectively erased the racial terror that accompanied it, effectively silencing racism as the defining motivation for issues of voting. By failing to explicate the connections between racism, violence, and power, Elizabeth disconnected the activity of voting from its motivating impetus, and from its ongoing relevance today. Her use of language here and elsewhere is representative of the emaciated public language of race that Fields & Fields (2014) described so forcefully. In this case, despite her “progressive” stance, Elizabeth diverted attention away from what really happened and towards a seemingly neutral history through her use of “natural shibboleths,” e.g., “voter registration changes” a seemingly inoffensive and historically empty stand-in for more condemnatory language that frames the reality of the problem of suppression, racism, exploitation, injustice, etc. (p. 146).

In another example of her curriculum, Elizabeth detailed an activity she recently taught during her enslavement unit where she had her students put aside their moral qualms about slavery and debated the economic “benefits or lack of benefit of the institution of slavery in the United States.” She explained having students explore different sources and teach each other in jigsaw groups, where each document represented different arguments in favor or against slavery. Next, students had a Socratic debate about “whether or not the United States would have economically benefited by relying on slavery as a foundation for the economy, which is what the agrarian South was open for while the slowly industrializing North was moving further and further away from that institution,” asserting that this question allowed students “to look at slavery from a perspective that...none of them had ever looked at

before.”

Elizabeth took care to note that the class did not explore “any of the moral or political implications, only the economic implications,” explaining her decision:

We kind of started the class with the foundation that we can all agree that, morally speaking, enslaving a group of people is not the right thing to do. That's not part of what we're talking about. That's not our argument here. We're simply looking at economic pros and cons. And so, allowing them to frame it in an economic perspective made some of them feel very uncomfortable at first, because some of them did take that pro side...I had one of them read the Mudsill theory, and when they've read that they're like, well, it kinda does make sense, you do need a group of people to kind of serve as that building block of the economy and it's the dirty job that nobody wants to do, so why not use forced labor to do it? The only way the economy will grow with that. And so, the kids who were reading from that perspective at first were very uncomfortable because it's something that they weren't used to putting into the frame of their thought process for any history class.

Despite her preface at the beginning of the explanation putting aside the moral and political reservations about the activity and her insistence that the institution of slavery was morally wrong, Elizabeth—knowingly or not—created a permission structure that rationalized slavery for students. She viewed this as a positive benefit of her teaching—that students were able to explore topics they were not used to,

processing information that they had not considered prior to this lesson. She described students' original discomfort shifting as they confronted and accepted sources justifying the need for forced labor. By the end of the activity, Elizabeth reported that students mostly sided against the institution of slavery in terms of its economic benefit, citing stagnation and the lack of social mobility. Still, in her deliberate focus on the economics of slavery and her centering of voices that did not discuss the atrocities of enslavement, Elizabeth pointedly downplayed the horrors of enslavement, racism, and created space for students to defend slavery's legitimacy. Whether she intended to or not, this type of activity created a level of race evasive comfort for students. This is a powerful example of the ways in which relying on "multiple sources" as an antiracist approach can backfire. In this case, multiple perspectives instantiated justifications of racism, to racist effect.

While Elizabeth often cited reluctance to transgress state laws outlining what she could and could not teach, in this case, she decided to flout the law prohibiting teaching the positive aspects of slavery. She expressed fears in doing so, explaining that "it really scared the shit out of me to teach this lesson...because that technically falls under what we're not allowed to teach. But because it was AP, again, it's in our kind of scope in the AP curriculum, so I had a little bit more leniency there. But it's made me very, very hesitant to talk about topics and to teach lessons that I have had a lot of success with in the past." When probed about what part of the new laws this lesson would violate, she validated her understanding of the consequences of the lesson—that students might interpret the "the institution of slavery as a positive

good.”

Yet, while Elizabeth was willing to violate state legislative requirements in order to teach about the economic benefits of slavery, she refused to do so while teaching about the 13th amendment, despite her own historical understandings connecting police brutality today with historical policing, gang labor during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, and the 13th amendment which legalized slavery as a punishment for criminal violations. She explained:

I haven't had any kids make the connection with the 13th Amendment, not explicitly outline like slavery as a punishment for legal purposes yet. I'm hoping that maybe one day I'll have a student who's got that intellect high enough that they can make that connection. But it's a really tough connection to make, especially since I don't really explicitly give them anything. Because again, really nervous to go there.

In the above quote, Elizabeth acknowledged the connection between the 13th amendment and the continuity of slavery but refused to make the explicit connection for students for fear that it violated her “scope and sequence” which framed it as the “amendment that freed the slaves, like period” rather than “like, let’s actually read what the whole amendment said.” Instead, Elizabeth hoped that eventually she’d have a student with high enough “intellect” to make the connection themselves, their critical understandings dependent on themselves rather than on her direction as a teacher. In her vacillating willingness to adhere to or transgress state-level

requirements about content, Elizabeth revealed a pedagogical commitment that protected race-evasive and racist historical understandings that justified enslavement, which countered her claims to be anti-racist.

Making Sense of Elizabeth's Racial Axioms

The embedded contradictions in Elizabeth's naturalized racial axioms were less glaring than Ronald's and were more difficult to parse, in part because much of what she reported had notes of historical accuracy and acknowledgment of core realities of the constructed nature of race. Still, Elizabeth's discourse perhaps can best be characterized by the vast array of silences and opacity around topics related to race which surface questions about the purpose, intention, and knowledge that informed her curricular choices. Was her lack of explication of the various atrocities of racism due to her discomfort with the interview format? Was it because she was driving in a car to pick up her daughter from daycare during the interview? Did she feel like the invocation of particular events like Japanese American Internment and Native assimilation were enough to satisfy my questions about where she incorporated racism into her curriculum? Did I fail to ask sufficient follow up questions? Or were they the result of a lack of substantive historical knowledge about the intricacies of race and racism in US history resulting from her own background and set of commitments? Was Elizabeth truly constrained by the political backdrop of her state? And if so, why did she oscillate in flouting legislative restrictions in some cases (like on the economics of slavery) and not in other cases (like the 13th amendment)?

Answers to these questions would only be conjecture. What I can know is that

Elizabeth reported to know about race —that it was invented; that it coincided with the institutionalization of slavery, and that it was tied to economics; and about racism—that it was real, experienced by people she knew in the form of racial profiling, and historically via voter restrictions (though she did not call it that), slavery, internment, assimilation, and suburban white segregation (though again, she did not label it in that way); and today through a lack of representation of people of color in the media, and the proper way to refer to Indigenous peoples. I also know that Elizabeth’s invocations of racism tended to downplay these activities— either making light of them through over-the-top simulations that became playful, or through activities that rationalized the institution of slavery apart from racism and racial atrocities. This curricular downplaying stood in contrast to what Elizabeth claimed to know about race and racism and her belief in herself as an antiracist teacher, which she described as occurring passively—through neutral history teaching and through including multiple perspectives. Like Ronald, Elizabeth deployed these racial ideologies in pieces, attaching their meanings to varied effect in her choices about what to teach. Here, I consider the silence a critical part of the “pieces” indicative of her racial ideologies— these missing pieces, in the lack of explication, speak volumes about Elizabeth’s version of antiracism, her racial ideations, and her lack of willingness to engage in critical history teaching based on her political context.

Synthesis and Further Questions

The conflicting racial axioms that populated Ronald and Elizabeth’s descriptions

of race and related concepts raise questions about the impact of diversity measures, even those that appear to be surface-level or insufficient in disrupting whiteness and simplistic, individualized understandings of race. For example, was Ronald's emphasis on global perspectives hegemonically disruptive given his cloistered white context? While on the surface, Ronald's rhetoric seemed to continue to support white supremacist thinking in many ways, his interventions into his students' racist stereotypes about Mexico and 'building the wall' and others also should not be discounted. Ronald described teaching his students about the Tulsa Race Massacre, a critical piece of history of racial violence often ignored in traditional curriculum, citing this as an example of the ways that he had changed his curriculum to become more inclusive. At the same time, he also labeled the event 'a race riot' — a naming practice that effectively places blame for the massacre on the Black community rather than acknowledging the Black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma as the victim of a massacre. Ronald discussed Manifest Destiny in ways that represented Indigenous perspectives and acknowledged that Andrew Jackson and others had reneged on Indigenous treaties. Yet, he also defended not adjusting his curriculum more due to time constraints, decrying the fact that he already could only spend 3 weeks on Rome. While Ronald's anti-Blackness cannot be ignored, this research asks, was Ronald's toeing of diversity important given his conservative community? Is strategic deployment of diversity a necessity given external constraints? Finally, what work did Ronald's "diverse" interventions do in actually disrupting white supremacist thinking amongst his students?

Along these lines, Elizabeth articulated progressive understandings about the constructedness of race and mentioned various elements of systemic racism that included the continuation of enslavement via incarceration in the 13th amendment, the overarching whiteness of the suburbs, and affirmed the real emotional effects of racism for people of color close to her. Yet, she also downplayed and/or refused to address these ideas with her students out of fear, or unwillingness. She also leaned on content that reinforced white supremacist ideals; for example, engaging students in debating the merits of slavery, raising questions about the effects of teachers' ideological inconsistencies on students' historical and racialized understandings. Finally, Elizabeth's reliance on multiple perspectives ended up shoehorning actual antiracist educational efforts in the permission structure that it created for students to justify enslavement.

The examples of Ronald and Elizabeth also highlight questions about the extent to which the political landscape—whether statewide or locally—truly affects teachers' curriculum and pedagogy. Both Ronald and Elizabeth described on multiple occasions feeling like they had to change, or had already changed, their curriculum based on their particular contexts. For Ronald, his white and politically conservative community alerted him to the limits of how much “diversity” they could handle rather than the top-down legislative forces. By contrast, Elizabeth's school context did not cause her to feel constrained and in fact, she described her liberal student population as pushing her own critical consciousness around issues related to race. By contrast, the larger statewide political context did cause her to worry about and, at times, alter

her curriculum based on state standards and the curricular scope-and-sequences to avoid more critical components of history that fell outside of narratives of American progress. Still, in specific moments, she made decisions to push past these impositions based on her own interests regarding what she wanted for her students. If her student and school communities seemed amenable to a more progressive curriculum, what was she so afraid of? While the landscapes informing the level of constraint teachers experienced with respect to teaching critically about race and racism is further explored in Chapters 6 and 7, it seems clear that in these cases, Ronald and Elizabeth's racial ideologies and commitments to antiracism only went so far as they perceived their largely white communities able to handle.

Ronald and Elizabeth inchoate narratives of race and racism were inflected with their cultural backgrounds, their community contexts and what they perceived as the expectations of those communities, their student populations, their state policy backdrops, and their own views of what history is and how it should be taught. It seems clear that these ideologies were also informed by their historical views of racism, their understandings of antiracism, and their fidelity to white supremacy (though they would likely never say that). Quite often, their descriptions of race/racism conflicted with their pedagogical applications. Ultimately, while lacking in coherence and peppered with some progressive leanings alongside more white-supremacist axioms, these examples raise questions about the composition of racial ideologies writ large and whether they can be characterized as rational.

As participants in global capitalism, we are all, in some ways or another,

implicated in all kinds of racial projects that protect white supremacy. We all likely express various forms of white racial knowledge (Leonardo, 2008) regardless of racial identities and/or articulate elements of white supremacist discourses despite efforts to the contrary. Harkening back to Fields & Fields (2014), on many levels, race itself is irrational, and so it makes sense that Ronald and Elizabeth's own descriptions might mirror that irrationality. And indeed, all racial ideologies likely have notes of inconsistencies and ruptures because of the impoverished nature of racial language and understanding and because of the conflicting influences, commitments, and discourses informing individuals' worldviews. While not as pronounced in this sample of award-winning teachers whom I interviewed, Ronald and Elizabeth's ideologies in pieces are likely representative of a broad swath of teachers in the United States, especially because the colorblind era of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) served as the backdrop many of today's working teachers.

Still, Ronald and Elizabeth's ideologies in pieces point to interesting directions for further exploration, namely the intersections and contradictions between historical knowledge and white racial knowledge. A lack of coherent understanding of the history of race and expressions of racism was evident at different points in Ronald and Elizabeth's interviews. For example, Ronald described "race" as a central issue right now and went on to describe the ways that different races are going against each other. This view indicates a fundamental belief in discrete, naturally occurring racial groups without an acknowledgement of the ways in which race was and continues to be made and remade over time. Instead, in his ignorance of the hierarchical structure

at the basis of racism implied was understanding that the life and death effects of racism are equally experienced by people of all races, rather than those raced as non-white. Along these lines, Elizabeth also mentioned racism as a construct, which contradicts with other understandings she expressed regarding the realness of systemic racism. Perhaps she meant race as a construct and misspoke, or perhaps this view was indicative of larger gaps in a systematic understanding of race and racism in America.

In these cases, I wondered about the depth and extent of Ronald and Elizabeth's systematic understandings of race and related concepts, and whether their ideologies in pieces were the product of historical ignorance, or white ignorance, described by Mills (2007) as an active group-level misrecognition of the forces of racism that have shaped this country. Although it is impossible to know for sure, the cases of Ronald and Elizabeth surface important questions about the varying effects of these types of piecemeal racial ideologies deployed in their school/student contexts, forcing consideration of which is worse? Is it better to have nods of antiracist discourse, even when it does not subvert an overarching white supremacist narrative? Or do these stabs at "diversity" do more to subsume an antiracist project? I continue to grapple with these questions in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6: Award-winning History Teachers' Navigation of Anti-“CRT”

Efforts Nationwide

Overview

In the wake of the racial reckoning of 2020, various U.S. actors including politicians, policymakers, parent associations, school boards, and other far right political formations have caricatured and demonized “Critical Race Theory”¹ (CRT) in an effort to control what teachers can teach about race and racism. Animated by restricting “divisive” material and guided by common talking points, these actors argue that “CRT” risks exacerbating already entrenched political polarities or offending the feelings of dominant groups historically responsible for oppression in various forms (e.g., white people). In reality, these are loosely cloaked efforts to shield students from learning about enslavement and genocide, realities of any accurate rendering of U.S. History, which may incite more critical understandings of the history of the United States and engender more complicated views of and actions against systemic oppressions that exist today. Christopher Rufo, the conservative ideologue first responsible for locating the right’s bogeyman in “CRT,” explicitly admitted his constituency’s goal via Twitter in March 2021, stating, “We have successfully frozen their brand— ‘critical race theory’—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as

¹ Following the lead of the Conflict Campaign report (Pollock et al., 2022), I use quotation marks around Critical Race Theory and its acronym, CRT, intentionally to draw attention to caricatured catch-all term operationalized by the Right-wing apparatus in bad-faith that bears little resemblance to the scholarly theory of Critical Race Theory.

we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category.” He continued, “The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think ‘critical race theory’” (quoted in Williams, 2022). Here Rufo cynically elucidated the specific discursive strategy employed by the Right—aggregating the various “cultural insanities” into one “brand category,” e.g., “CRT,” infiltrating the public imagination with interpretations of the acronym as dangerous in order to ignite a particular contingency of (mostly white) people as a larger means of politically mobilizing a (largely white) populous in support of right-wing formations that protect white supremacist systems.

Although this is merely the newest iteration of curricular conflict that has characterized the field of education since the beginning of public schooling in America (Moreau, 2003), the impact of these efforts has been felt nationally. At the time of writing this chapter in April 2023, 42 states have taken steps to limit what history teachers can teach their students about race and racism; 17 have successfully passed statewide legislation and another 4 states have introduced legislation that is currently under debate (Schwartz, 2023). Additionally, the Conflict Campaign Report found that 894 school districts across the United States, in both states with and without statewide restrictive efforts, have been impacted by local efforts to combat “CRT” (Pollock et al., 2022). These restrictive efforts have affected teachers across the country, impacting their abilities to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and to teach history in accurate and complex ways. Pollock et al. (2022) found that teachers faced pushback from parents’ groups and other community

organizations even for inoffensive measures like identity discussions in their classrooms. Villavicencio et al. (2023) similarly reported that their East coast school-based partners engaged in research-practice partnerships around racial justice were profoundly affected by fears of retribution for merely mentioning race with their students. In Florida, college professors of race and ethnicity are being forced to cancel or modify their courses due to government pressure (Golden, 2022). Even in Democrat-controlled California, Chang (2022) found that white parent activists mounted an organized opposition campaign to ethnic studies, positioning Christian white boys as the victims of ethnic studies curricula, leveraging relationships with disability activists to bind their local countermovements to larger right-wing populism.

Each of these is an example of a curricular countermovement described by Chang (2022) as “an oppositional movement that aimed to circumscribe what students should know by delegitimizing programs that cultivated the academic achievement and critical consciousness of non dominant youth” (p. 159). Chang (2022) situated these tactics using Harris’s (1993) scholarship on whiteness as property, drawing the connection between schooling and whiteness, whereby, in addition to filtering access to physical educational spaces through school segregation efforts, white supremacy also brokers access to non-physical property including academic opportunities, norms around conduct, and most relevant for this chapter, curricular content.

To this point, most of the literature on the effects of anti- “CRT” legislation has been journalistic—either focused on legislative tracking of statewide efforts (e.g.,

Schwartz, 2023), or has homed in on the specific political battles occurring in individual districts (e.g., Williams, 2022; Bergner, 2022; the Southlake podcast, 2021), mapping the longitudinal and complex community dynamics that have animated the “CRT” backlash in different locations. By contrast, the Conflict Campaign, a report generated by a research team led by Mica Pollock and John Rogers, offers analyses on the initial effects of anti- “CRT” policies on educators and school districts, locating the broad trends affecting teachers, regardless of official policy. The report features analysis of media stories, survey responses from teachers, and interviews with equity officials serving in DEI offices around the country and found that educators across the country, in both restrictive and non-restrictive state contexts, were experiencing mounting fears or threats of being punished for teaching about race and racism in the ways that they saw fit. The Conflict Campaign’s sample largely represented the experiences of educators in liberal communities and in school districts serving predominantly students of color (p. 10). They also noted in their analysis, however, that the more extreme stories skewed towards politically contested or conservative areas where most constituents were white. Educators from liberal areas in their study described vocal minorities of white groups of parents or politicians, particularly in places that were becoming less white over time. The educators in their study who described being unencumbered were largely situated in liberal areas frequently (though not always) serving students of color.

In this chapter, I explore how the award-winning history teachers who participated in this study were differently affected by anti-CRT legislative efforts and

other policy-based interventions based on their specific sociopolitical contexts and social positioning. Fourteen of the 39 teachers (39%) described feeling some level of constraint based on the anti-CRT political movements. Twenty-five of the 39 teachers (69%) taught in states that had either introduced or passed anti-CRT legislation and 15 out of 39 (38%) teachers taught in states that had passed counter-legislation expanding the teaching of race, racism, ethnic studies, Indigenous histories, African American history, Asian American history, and/or other critical content areas. Notably, a few of these states had either passed or introduced both anti- “CRT” *and* legislation expanding the teaching of race and racism concurrently. Five of the 39 teachers (13%) reported actually altering their curriculum due to anti- “CRT” restrictions, citing that as an effect, they had limited the amount of instructional time spent teaching about racial violence and/or the terms they could use to describe particular phenomenon (e.g., American exceptionalism, white privilege, institutional racism). As evidenced by these findings, the level to which teachers experienced feelings of restriction, at times, coincided with official policy restrictions, and at other times, even the teachers in the seemingly most restrictive settings, did not always report feeling constrained. This chapter describes the particularities informing teachers’ feelings of constraint (or lack thereof) around anti- “CRT” policies and legislation, showing that the level of restriction facing teachers was most often locally determined, resulting from actions by parents, policymakers, administrators and other community-based actors who conferred respect or opposition onto teachers; along with teachers’ own sense of confidence in defending their practices against potential

challenges.

I begin this chapter by outlining some of the structural factors that reduced teachers' sense of risk. I then describe the ways in which various contextual factors conferred teachers' senses of agency and power. Next, I highlight a subset of teachers' acts of creative insubordination (Gutierrez, 2015; 2016) using Hall's articulation theory to frame these acts (Hall, 1986). I end the chapter by weighing the discursive effects of these types of strategic invocations, grappling with the extent to which self-protection buoyed or disrupted the status quo. In Chapter 7, I expand upon an additional tactic— the strategic wielding of history-specific disciplinary practices as a means to stave off critique.

Guiding Theoretical Concepts: Creative Insubordination and Ideological Articulation

To understand teachers' navigation of their sociopolitical situations and the strategies by which they continued to teach about race and racism regardless of official restriction, I use Gutiérrez's research on creative subordination which focused on how secondary math teachers bent "the rules" in order to advocate for all students' access to high quality mathematics education (Gutiérrez, 2015; 2016). Her project documented various strategies through which teachers navigated their workplaces including creating counter-narratives to the achievement gap, highlighting the humanity and uncertainty of mathematics, and refusing to go along with certain procedures required by workshop leads (among others) (p. 680). Gutiérrez (2015) described these "violations" as "benign and counter-bureaucratic" in order "to ensure

that the system directives do not impinge unfairly or inappropriately on teachers and students and to avoid the possible backlash that outright defiance might incur” (p. 679-680). Here, I use this framing to unpack how the history teachers in this study navigated the assault on teaching about race, racism, etc., exploring their various exertion of agency and strategic maneuvering in light of political encumbrances, in order to continue to teach in the manner in which they were prepared, and/or in ways that are faithful to disciplinary history.

I couple the framing of creative insubordination with Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation in order to make sense of the discursive dynamics that accompanied teachers’ navigation of official policies and expectations (Hall, 1986). While Hall et al. (2022) acknowledged the fictitiousness of race, he also viewed it as a “discursive system” with real, symbolic, and material effects (p. 453). At the same time, Hall argued that race is “never purely ideological or cultural” but rather situated in “everyday social and economic relations” which enabled the construction of both “politics and identity” (Solomos, 2014, p. 1670-1671). He understood articulation to be the process of “creating connection” between disparate parts, in fragmentary, fleeting, and contextually bound ways, complicating fixed or uniform notions of group interests motivated by race, class, or other identifications.

Articulation works from a Gramscian (1973) notion that hegemony is not uniform but rather that there exist multiple common senses which are always operationalized differently to varied effects depending on the time, place, and social conditions. This definition holds that articulation is engaged at all levels in “play[s] of power.”

Because teachers' sociopolitical terrain and navigational tactics were contextually bounded in numerous ways determined by their power and positionality within the dynamics of domination and subordination, and thus their responses to those conditions hinged on unique particularized understandings of their communities, schools, students, and more.

In his theory of articulation, Hall resisted the boundaries of "the more conventional monological mode of politics" which in turn, enabled a "conversation that moved," refiguring the "field of possibilities" (Clarke, 2015, p. 284). In this sense, I understand the navigational tactics employed by teachers as a form of ideological articulation whereby they appropriated or rejected various discourses, syntactic phrasing, jargon, etc., in order to continue to teach about race and racism in ways that they wanted to. These navigations were imbued with a sociopolitical force, meaning that their rejection or re-articulation of right-wing constraints on their discourses constituted subversive acts where they resumed control over the discourse. Whether or not they acknowledged it as such (in fact, many described these acts as maintaining neutrality or being above politics), these articulations constituted a form of political action, implying what Hall considered to have political effects: "selective work *vis-à-vis* the many common senses, involving both the selective mobilization of some aspects and the obverse: the selective *demobilisation* of other elements by rendering them silent, ridiculous, unrealistic, out of time or pace and so on" (Clarke, 2015, p. 280). These discursive tactics included staunch denial of teaching "CRT," (even in cases when they admitted adhering to certain theoretical principles),

deliberate silences, profuse/frontloaded transparency, and pointed attention to suppressions, all to counter-hegemonic effect.

Structural Reductions of Risk

Many teachers in this study felt at least somewhat protected by structural determinants like the type of school they taught in or their student demographics, even in states with restrictive anti “CRT” policies. Teachers who taught in charter schools described having much more leeway in their curriculum because they were not beholden to the same level of enforcement as typical public schools. Polly, a high school teacher at a charter school in a Southeastern state described that she felt comfortable putting her job on the line, explaining:

If it came to someone saying, well, you're going to go to jail or we're going to take your job or whatever, I would fight that battle, whatever it looked like. I just don't really have any fear about that because it's just so patently ridiculous to me to teach in any other way. I would not be intimidated into teaching it in any other way.

Similarly, private school teachers, by and large, felt more protected in the level of critical content they could engage regardless of state and district-level official restrictions. For example, despite teaching in a politically conservative Southern state, Drake described feeling unencumbered in his quest to teach critical histories irrespective of his largely conservative and privileged student population and his location in a Republican district. Similarly, Frank taught predominantly economically

privileged students in a Catholic school in an urban center. In one example, he described hosting a diverse group of politically involved parents at Back-to-School Night where he was able to reassure parents who challenged him that their kids would be alright as long as they could think for themselves. He attributed this to his level of expertise and long history at the school.

In other cases, local economic affluence foreclosed critiques facing other areas of states. For example, Owen, a teacher in a southeastern state with a Republican governor taught in a very wealthiest suburb and reported no encumbrances to his teaching, at least not yet. In this case, teaching the children of the elite proffered him a level of freedom that did not always exist for teachers in more politically conservative or politically contested areas. This was an interesting contrast to Pollock et al. 's (2022) findings that localized conflict campaigns were most frequently sparked in districts with the greatest level of ideological and racial diversity along with Williams's (2022) contention that wealthy suburbs are some of the most "purple" districts. In Owen's context, however, the controversy over "CRT" had not yet arrived.

By and large, teachers who taught predominantly students of color also did not feel the same depth of restriction as some of their more constrained counterparts who taught in predominantly white districts. In fact, none of the 6 teachers who taught predominantly students of color reported feeling constrained by any "CRT" restrictions. This was due, in some cases, to the statewide sociopolitical climate. For example, Ariella, taught in a 100% Black school in a Midwestern metropolis where

both the state and city had taken legislative action to enshrine a commitment to culturally relevant curriculum, making the teaching of diverse and critical histories a central teaching expectation. She reported no pushback for critical history teaching, and instead, viewed teaching critically about race, racism, gender, class, etc. as paramount to her job as a teacher. Similarly, for Arthur, his extremely diverse student population and liberal state backdrop demanded that he incorporate an array of perspectives into his curriculum. Moreover, most parent-led anti- “CRT” groups were led by white parents who employed rhetoric fearing the imparting of “guilt” for white (and frequently male) students (Pollock et al., 2022). Thus, it makes sense that teachers who taught mostly students of color in non-diverse school settings were less affected by anti- “CRT” rhetoric, regardless of their state political context.

There were a few cases, however, where teachers described lone sites of pushback where parents of color mounted resistance in particular instances where they feared for their child’s well-being. For example, Francesca described an incident where a father of a Black student complained that her course content positioned Black people as persistent victims of oppression in ways that he did not want his kid to internalize. She explained: “His whole thing is, I don’t want my kid to have a message that they are in any way, shape, or form likely to be discriminated against or to have a position in society where they are less than fully equal.” Here Francesca grappled with how to teach about African American history and include diverse histories without continuing to perpetuate harm for students of color for whom the stories of oppression are most frequently about. She elaborated, “How does it land on other

African American families and students who are like, I don't want to sit through the 13th [documentary] and listen to a narrative I already know that is actually doing more harm to me." She wondered about how to protect the feelings of students of color while also enacting a social justice curriculum "that's important for my white kids to hear." By contrast, Ursula described the pushback she received from a parent of a Black student regarding an assignment where students created "wanted posters" for indentured students, vehemently denying the connection between indentured servitude and slavery as having anything to do with race. I expand on Ursula's example in Chapter 7 as an example of the history-specific disciplinary antiracism approach gone awry.

Community Conferral of Teachers' Power and Agency

In addition to structural factors that reduced the hostility teachers faced regarding anti-CRT legislation, teachers' feelings of risk also depended on more specific contextual elements like the extent to which they felt protected by their school administrations and their social status in the community. Additionally, understanding and feeling known by their community, and/or viewed as having power made teachers feel insulated from opposition, even when they held divergent political stances.

Michelle, who taught in a conservative Southern state, felt that being well-respected as a U.S. history expert in her district insulated her from recrimination and gave her license to continue to teach about race and racism in historically grounded ways. She explained that the bills passed in her state didn't "mean anything to me... I

have a very solid reputation in my school and in my district as a reliable authority on United States history.” For Michelle, her master’s degree in U.S. history, her long history in her district, and her experiences having worked on state and local committees shaping history curriculum instilled a sense of confidence in her credentials that insulated her from feeling the impact of the statewide anti-CRT legislation. Along similar lines, Francesca felt that as a teacher in a Southwestern charter school with a strong college-going culture, parents and students felt beholden to teachers for grades and letters of recommendation for college. This gave her a sense of being needed by parents and students alike, which conferred a sense of safety even when her curricular choices pushed the envelope for the most conservative constituency of parents (though a minority overall in the school). In cases like these, teachers felt like they had sufficient administrative, community, or personal power protecting them from fear of retribution.

By contrast, other teachers faced serious risks for transgressing anti- “CRT” legislation. For example, Christina’s school was located in a very “red part of a “purple state,” a hostile context where teachers accused of teaching “institutionalized racism, white privilege, [or other] themes of CRT,” risked being sued for attacking students’ civil rights and if found guilty, losing their credential. She described an elected school board composed of a “few members who don’t speak and some very loud males” who were razor-focused on uncovering “CRT.” One parent quit his job to focus on these efforts full time, requesting “a list of all teachers who have attended anti-racist, anti-bias, abolitionist teaching—any sort of, diversity, equity, inclusivity,

training,” expressing interest in wanting to visit each classroom in the school with the goal of locating any “CRT books” populating classroom bookshelves. As she described this situation, Christina expressed fear that she would be identified, admitting that she “100%” does have CRT related books on her bookshelf: “I have books from every perspective.” Christina recounted how this singular “strong voice on the school board” sought to expand the state’s divisive concepts law into the school board policy and described how her district had handled the issue thus far:

Within the first two weeks of school, we had a full schoolwide high school middle school district meeting with our lawyer, who broke down the law and explained our responsibilities, how we wouldn't break the law and what would happen if we did. As I said, I'm in a very conservative area. I think there's a fear that they're there watching everything.

As she recounted these circumstances, she worried, “they won’t be able to tie this back to me, right?” to which I let her know that her state, name, and identifying details would be omitted from the research. Still, despite these hostile conditions and her fears that people would realize the critical curriculum utilized in her classroom that connected medieval history to contemporary explorations of systemic racism (more on this in Chapter 7), Christina still felt more protected in this context than she expected to feel in other potential environments. This was due to having developed long standing relationships with families in her many years of teaching siblings, and even parents. She explained,

I am terrified to go somewhere else where I don't already have a community presence, where parents wouldn't all already defend me and understand who I am as an educator.

In another extreme example, Colleen, described teaching in a “pretty conservative area... where the plantations really were” in a Southeastern state without statewide anti-CRT restrictions. She explained how in the rural areas outside of the city, “you'll have more of that agrarian lifestyle and you'll have a lot of people that will maybe deny that race is a factor... and all lives matter. And, you know, even though those are not my beliefs, we respectfully address them in the classroom.” Still, despite her long tenure at the K-8 school where all three of her children had attended, Colleen recounted an incident where she went viral on Facebook and ended up being featured on the local news for using a district-approved sub-plan featuring a quote by Chadwick Boseman supporting Black Lives Matter. She narrated this incident:

So last year, I was going to be out... I put a county approved assignment on my online classes, and I'm in the Wal-Mart parking lot and I get a text from my principal that says to take that assignment down immediately. Apparently, I was completely blown up on Facebook. People were calling for my job....

In this case, despite a lack of official restriction and having used a district approved assignment, the outraged local community mobilized to publicly pressure the principal to force Colleen to take the assignment down. She explained the assignment and the community's critique:

The article quoted one of the movies he was in and it said something about race and white people. And I guess everybody just got stupid and stopped reading...I had phone calls all day...And I was just like, what is going on? And then I get an email from the local news station. Would you like to go on TV? We've noticed that on Facebook, you're being—I don't remember how they phrased it— basically run through the mud for supporting Black Lives Matter...would you like to comment?... I called my principal back and I said, okay, what is happening? I don't understand. And he said, Well, it's everywhere. It's all over Facebook. Your lesson is fine. There's nothing wrong with your lesson. They did not read the assignment. Taking it down was a stopgap to mitigate the bleeding because he [the principal] knew how it would be for me. But apparently a parent had seen it who was a police officer.

Here, even though the assignment was district approved and referenced Black Lives Matter only sparingly, the assignment tapped into a larger political conversation with discursive notes of anti-Blackness, the 'defund the police' movement, BLM, anti-white, anti-American, and other right-wing talking points. In this way, Colleen became an unintentional cipher, an embodiment of conservative discord and a target, which she described as both puzzling and shocking:

My dad went to West Point, my aunt's a two-time gold medalist, I mean, you can't get more patriotic. And so it was hard, it was really hard and it was all happening when I wasn't there, over text, and I kept—I was taking it down

and it was just blowing up and blowing up. And I had no idea why.

Colleen became so alienated by the community that she eventually left her job and found refuge in a more diverse and welcoming school community. For Christina and Colleen, though the sources of the hostility varied—legally mandated in one case and community-based in the other—the effects were similarly terrorizing. Most importantly, however, and the focus of the rest of this chapter: despite feeling constrained by policies or being harassed by hostile community members, nearly every teacher interviewed described methods for circumventing these legalistic or sociopolitical barriers to continue to persevere in teaching history to the manner of their choosing.

While the Conflict Campaign found that instances of teacher autonomy and/or pushback largely occurred in contexts with students of color as the main demographic, or in liberal enclaves, I found that many of the teachers in the study, in many different sociopolitical contexts, were willing to face off in service of their teaching goals, despite the risks. This, of course, was a privilege that had to do with these teachers elevated statuses as award-winning, esteemed teachers as determined by the state, with a great deal of teaching experience, and of course, was also enabled by their whiteness, which added additional layers of insulation from blame of incitation likely unavailable to teachers of color occupying similar positions. Additionally, only a smaller subset of teachers saw themselves as activists or motivated by social transformation. Most of them saw themselves as not wanting to rock the boat, but as committed to discipline of history.

In the next section, I use Gutiérrez's framing of creative subordination and Hall's theory of articulation to make sense of the ways in which teachers wielded their power as a means to self-protect and/or remain faithful to critical history teaching irrespective of constraint (Gutiérrez, 2015; 2016; Hall, 1986). Creative insubordination describes how teachers work to ensure that system directives (like state-wide legislation and/or district-wide policies) do not impinge on their ability to teach nor on students' abilities to learn, while also avoiding the backlash that might accompany outright defiance (Gutierrez, 2015). Articulation pays close attention to how competing power relations engage in discursive contestation to appropriate and re-appropriate the terms of debates in pursuit of hegemonic narrative control. These theories illuminate how teachers exert their agency and tactical maneuvering in order to continue to teach about race and racism in contradiction to official and unofficial policy.

Creative Insubordination & Re-Articulation in Navigating anti- "CRT" Efforts

In each of the examples below teachers engaged in discursive articulation and re-articulation, whereby they sought to and often effectively navigated fraught political terrain through wielding explicit denial, selective silences, transparency, and directing student attention to topic suppression in ways that conveyed meanings about race/racism even while seemingly silent.

Denial of "CRT"

Teachers' denial that they were teaching "CRT" was a dominant theme across

participants. Even when they acknowledged the similarities between teaching about systemic racism and principles of Critical Race Theory, in nearly every case, teachers vehemently denied that they were teaching the university level theory, and/or relied on administrative negations of teaching it, while aware of the overlaps. In this way, teachers again engaged in strategic re-articulation of the accused act, (in this case, teaching “CRT”) by mobilizing pointed denial in order to continue to teach the substance of the act. In one example, Brenda drew a disciplinary distinction asserting,

I'm not teaching CRT. I'm teaching history. You know, honestly, I know what CRT is kind of abstractly, but I never took a course in CRT because I didn't go to law school. So, you know, it's just a dog whistle. And I'm not going to bow down to that.

In this case, Brenda claimed ignorance on CRT in order to present her teaching of history in contradistinction. She also called out the “dog whistle,” e.g., the right’s contortion of “CRT,” naming the cynical intent behind the anti “CRT” movement. In her staunch denial of “CRT” and calling out of the game, Brenda refused subordination and re-articulated the terms of the debate.

Tyler, a teacher in a conservative southwestern state also vehemently denied teaching about CRT, while simultaneously explicitly affirming his commitment to teaching about systemic racism, citing examples like redlining. In this case, claiming silence on CRT actually enabled him to teach some of its key principles. He explained the context in which he operates and how he orients his pedagogical

practice in a politically conservative environment:

One of the things that when people ask me the question, I say what I've taught in class has not changed... Nowadays, people really try to figure out a way to put a label on it so that they can say what they want about it. But what I say about race and what I say about the past when it comes to the United States and race, the message has always been the same. The lessons have always been the same when it comes to the students.

Here, Tyler acknowledged the aligning threads between his teaching goal of excavating systemic racism, but also asserting that despite the increasingly hostile sociopolitical landscape, his teaching has been largely unchanged. Implicit in this explanation is a critique of people trying to “figure out a way to put a label on it,” but steadfast was his refusal to be pigeonholed or targeted. Again, like Brenda, Tyler rejected the terms of the debate in order to maintain fidelity to his approach and commitment to teaching about race systemically.

Drake understood that there were many commonalities with the way he approached teaching U.S. history and the tenets of Critical Race Theory, explaining,

By the standard definition of critical race theory, it's impossible to teach American history well and not talk about the underlying system systems that have created inequality, right? And notions of race.

Still, he recounted how his administration dealt with the onslaught of parental

concern about the “dangers” of “CRT” by vehemently denying that it was a content area being taught at their school. He recalled,

This is kind of an interesting thing that happened this year as our head of school at the beginning of the year, in front of all of the faculty, said listen, we're not going to talk about Critical Race Theory.

He elaborated:

The conclusion that we came to is from talking to our very liberal dean of faculty... our head of school is a very smart, open, Ivy League educated, you know, very sharp, with-it guy. And effectively what he was saying was, I know what you teach, but don't call it critical race theory because some parent is going to lose their marbles over it because it was all in the news...

In this case, Drake and his administration understood the political landmine that risked being exploding by open acknowledgement of the elements of CRT actually being taught at the school and thus, made a strategic decision to deny any semblance of “CRT” in protection of the actual content and teachers. Through staunch denial of teaching “CRT” these teachers and others, with varying degrees of recognition of acknowledgement of actual “CRT” in their classroom, retained autonomy over their classrooms and their teaching.

Though frequently invoked, the denial of teaching “CRT” in K-12 contexts is illustrative of larger tensions of why and whether an outright rejection of “CRT ” on

the part of teachers is the way to go. Stovall & Annamma (2021) argued that conversations about whether “CRT” is even taught in K-12 contexts and a defensive stance miss the larger point and the impetus behind these bans writ large—largely that the move against “divisive concepts” are a really a bad faith cover for protecting white supremacy. Because they argue that unveiling white supremacy will never be “palatable” to “those invested in upholding it.” This tension raises a larger question that I grapple with in Chapter 8, namely, is the expediency of the defensive stance that temporarily quiets “CRT” concerns the best approach when one’s ultimate goal is antiracism? In what ways does denying CRT end up proving the Right’s point, giving weight to the stance that CRT is something to be avoided in the classroom?

Transparency

Another way that teachers avoided backlash from their communities was through explicit disclosure of their expectations and by flooding parents and administrators with information about what was going on in their classrooms. For example, Tyler explained that one way he protects himself is by recording all his classes and posting them online. By making available all his course content for parents and other spectators, he strategically wielded both overt denial (of CRT) in conjunction with full panoptic surveillance, effectively hiding in plain sight.

Courtney similarly relied on the tactic of transparency to avoid potential community conflicts, explaining:

I make sure that I have a clear idea in my head of why I pick this text so then I

can explain it. I invite my supervisor and the curriculum coordinator into my Google classrooms so that they can see everything that I'm teaching. I keep my door open, I'm just as transparent as I possibly can be.

Eric, who taught a project-based curriculum in a diverse urban magnet school in a very autonomous context, described how one of his colleagues faced a great deal of backlash for exploring notions of “privilege” with their students. To avoid similar reprisal, he sent weekly newsletters to parents disclosing the critical topics his class was engaging in. By giving parents as much information as possible about the happenings of his class, he was able to avoid a parental pushback on his content.

In a similar vein, Peter, who taught in an elite private school context, front-loaded his expectations for parents by stating his commitment to teaching multiple perspectives. He explained,

So I give long thought to this, and actually at my first class meeting, I warned my students actually in writing and their parents that it is my job to bring different perspectives to them... and it is our job as a group during the year to deal with different perspectives on controversial issues. And if they have a problem with that, they should probably leave the class right then. And I have them submit an assignment saying that they do not have a problem with that.

In this case, Peter circumvented what he considered to be a very “dangerous” teaching environment for a lot of teachers by explicitly stating his expectations for his class and requiring students and parents to recognize these expectations in writing. Of

course, his position in a private school, and as a teacher of upper division classes proffer him a level of power and agency not necessarily available to many other teachers. Peter was able to submit to parents that if they were uncomfortable, students could simply disenroll, which is not always an option in other school contexts. Peter acknowledged these privileges, stating that “if you're prudent and in an earlier stage of your career than I am, you might really think twice or three times before accepting any teaching assignment that has you dealing directly with this politics course.” Here Peter demonstrated that he understood his specific positionality within his school and took preventative measures at the start of his class in order to avoid potential complaints.

Tyler, Courtney, Eric, and Peter each exemplified different ways in which teachers escaped potential discursive retribution by engulfing potential detractors in a deluge of information and a foregrounding of well-articulated and defensible expectations. These teachers creatively utilized surveillant structures like Google classrooms and classroom newsletters, in order to nullify or proscribe competing efforts. Here the tactic of transparency had disinfectant properties, inoculating teachers against further opposition.

Strategic Silences & Re-Articulation

Beyond denial of teaching “CRT,” teachers described teaching the same content excluding certain buzzwords that risked signaling larger political discourses. For example, Delia described how being immersed in her rural midwestern community gave her an understanding of the differences between the conservative rhetoric

employed by parents in her school and their actual sentiments around diversity. She explained:

I think if you were to ask our people in our community what they thought about Critical Race Theory, they'd be very anti it. They're a very Fox News sort of crowd around here. But I think if you said, I just want to teach history to make sure that we're including everybody's stories, including, you know, the Black Americans or including Native Americans, they'd be like, oh yeah, that's fine. You know, it's like they just hate the name. They don't even know what it means. And so as long as you're not using it, as long as you're just like, oh, no, we're just going to tell everybody's stories. They're like, oh, that's fine. Then they'd be very reasonable about it.

This example demonstrates how Delia's deep understanding of the community informed her framing of topics that could be possibly inflammatory for her conservative community. She understood both the effects of perceived-to-be incendiary topics for her parent population but also understood that alternative framing of the same topics would subdue that opposition. In this sense, Delia showcased Hall's (1986) principle of ideology articulation, whereby she reframed the terms of the debate predetermined by right wing political formations' demonization of "Critical Race Theory," instead fusing it with terms like "everybody's stories," in order to regain articulative power and narrative control about which she believed parents and community members would "be very reasonable."

As with others, Susan explained how she avoided using certain buzzwords that she knew would be inflammatory in her conservative context. She denied embracing antiracist principles, stating “I don’t use any of that language,” though in practice, she engaged in a variety of historical exercises where students reckoned with incidents of racial terror in ways that many would deem antiracist. Still, Susan narrated one instance where she actively avoided the use of certain concepts she considered to be politically “loaded”:

We were having to revise our course catalog...and in the description of it [the course], it talked about American exceptionalism post-World War Two. So I went to the assistant principal and said, let's take out that. Let's just call the power of the United States post-World War Two. We do not need to use that loaded language. I will teach American exceptionalism in terms of, this is an idea, and we'll look at the pros and the cons of it. But I'm not putting that in any... that's just not my deal. So I don't call it any of that. I don't use that language. Because if you've got a kid coming from a house where they're listening to Fox News all the time, they're going to shut down if I start using certain things. So if I just share primary sources, I share what happened in the history in our local community, then hopefully they will. They're smart kids.

Like Delia, Susan harnessed her knowledge of her community context to frame issues in ways that avoided content that could be seen as political (e.g., American exceptionalism). While she affirmed that she would continue to teach the content of

American exceptionalism using a pro/con approach, she repeatedly noted “I don’t use that language,” and “I don’t call it any of that,” understanding that depending on students’ political nurturing at home, they will “shut down” when confronted with certain politicized rhetoric. Here Susan viewed her efficacy as increased by the invocation of silences and/or discursive re-articulation that defanged progressive buzzwords.

Along similar lines, Stuart, who taught in an elite private school in a conservative Southern city explained that he eschewed teaching about whiteness in particular, arguing that he has seen how the term puts his white students on the defensive, reifying white supremacist attitudes rather than disrupting them. He elucidated:

I don’t use the word whiteness. I have talked about white supremacists. They know the Klan exists, they know these groups exist and still exist even. And I don't hesitate to mention things like that, and overwhelmingly nobody would ever defend that in front of me. And I don't think they even look at themselves.”

Here, Stuart noted the detachment between studying historical expressions of white supremacy and his students’ inability to position themselves within whiteness itself. To further this point, he detailed an incident on campus where a student group focused on cultural awareness brought up “white privilege” at an all-school meeting, which Stuart described as going “absolutely nuclear.” He explained, “They didn't say anything that I thought was necessarily wrong or outrageous, but that phrase, though,

tapped into that partisan kind of ideological identity politics and just... wildfire.” He situated this reaction within larger questions of antiracism and the limits with which he knew his school community could endure. Had he been teaching about the topic in his class, he explained that he would have:

talked about it from the angle of just individual justice, you know? Is it okay for the police to assault somebody who is unarmed or things like that? And I think they're much more open to discussing that kind of thing. But if they feel like there's...kind of criticism of their identity, it goes bad very quickly. Calling myself an antiracist at school, I don't think would be one of those trigger words. But if I said I was attacking white privilege, I think I might get run out of town.

This example showcases a sense of threat that accompanied white students' implications into white supremacy in a school and community context that continues to be heavily shaped by the legacy of enslavement and its aftermath. Stuart expressed feeling much more confident navigating the teaching of race and racism from a historical approach and by contrast, thought that teaching about more modern manifestations of racism was trickier, although he did do so at times, introducing his students to concepts like environmental racism for which he provided local examples. While Stuart acknowledged that his community could tolerate the language of “antiracism,” he knew that white privilege would be an inflammatory “trigger word,” leading to widespread displeasure from the white population at the school, which

seemed to have determining power over school dynamics. In his interview, he mentioned that his students of color often disclosed the hostile nature of their school experiences. Here, Stuart deliberately silenced white privilege as a discussion point to enact what he viewed as a more effective course of action. He explained, “I think if it’s seen as a balanced discussion that’s not picking on any of these scabs, you know, those trigger words, it goes a lot better for us.”

In his writing about articulation, Hall (1986) described hegemonic “lines of tendential force,” which are discourses are “potent, persistent, and effective,” serving as “powerful barriers to the potential for re-articulation” because they represent dominant modes of thought articulated by those with power and privilege (Hall cited in Slack, 1996 p. 124). In these cases, concepts like whiteness, white privilege, and American exceptionalism are particularly powerful articulations, imbued with hegemonic meaning about the foundations of America, what Hall (1989) described as constituting “‘material force’ dominating the cultural” (p. 43). To re-articulate them, or even bring them up to students as potential fodder for learning, was viewed by Susan and Stuart as potentially destabilizing in their classrooms, because critiquing white supremacy and American exceptionalism are existentially threatening to particular (white) constituencies.

According to Slack (1996), the aim of cultural theorists is to determine when, where and how these [dominant] circuits might be re-articulated” (p. 124). The teachers in this subsection were doing just that— recognizing—based upon systematic and cultural understandings of their communities— the level of tolerance,

word associations, and overall comfort-level of their constituencies and making tactical choices about how to approach their students in ways that they can hear. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will discuss the overarching effects of these choices, grappling with the ways in which tactics like Susan and Stuart's either pushed or reproduced the status quo.

Directed Attention to Suppression

Directing students' attention to silences and suppressions was a powerfully disruptive tactic employed by teachers who were teaching in particularly constrained contexts. To begin, Lauren, who taught in a conservative Southwestern state and described herself as an abolitionist teacher, elaborated on her approach for teaching about race and racism, which she offered as a counterexample to one of her colleagues who "gets a lot more pushback because she just throws it into your face." Instead, Lauren framed her work as drawing on leaving open space to see "where the research will lead the kids," explaining:

Being in a state where we have people actively trying to convince parents to sue us for teaching this sort of stuff, I find if you give them a chance to lead to the water, it really does help in presenting that knowledge because [if you] do the research, you're going to find it out.

For Lauren, one of the most effective antidotes to parental concerns about "CRT" was involving students in their own learning through inquiry and research where they could pursue their own questions as part of the course content. Also effective was

delicately drawing students' attention to the critical content that many of their parents were afraid of without calling out parents directly. She explained that "most of the students are on board," and "want to know this sort of stuff," elaborating that

The strange thing is the students are protecting the teachers from their parents because you do have kids who do want the knowledge, they do want the understanding...If I'm not allowed to know it, why am I not allowed to know it? And so sometimes that's how I've presented it, like with the 1619 project, I presented the essay where she talks about her father and it's like, so why are people upset with this? Presenting it from 'why is this an issue?' and framing it that way. And they're reading it, trying to figure out why would people have a problem with it? And they read it and are like, we don't understand what the problem is.

In this example, Lauren described a strategic pedagogical approach where she used pointed questions that called out certain stakeholders' interests in maintaining silences around certain topics. By introducing students to Nikole Hannah-Jones's essay in the 1619 Project and asking students why some might have a problem with it, Lauren lobbed an (albeit silent) critique against those who wish to silence the Project without having to do the heavy lifting herself. Instead, by inviting students to grapple with questions of "why," her students were able to come to new truths about both the validity of the narrative and also the fundamental fallaciousness of the anti "CRT " movement writ large.

Marie also raised attention to content suppression as a pedagogical strategy. Teaching in a university town that was becoming increasingly conservative, she found herself having to navigate the conservative statewide context which she described as impacting “a lot of the storytelling that I do and how I tell the story.” She dryly explained the ridiculousness of the new law:

We had to read part of the House bill and promise. I mean, some of it was stupid. Like, "I promise not to say you're prejudiced because of your race." And it was meant to protect the white kids, not the black kids... And then there was also something about meritocracy and how we were not supposed to speak poorly of it... and I just did the term Social Darwinism, so I already broke the meritocracy rule because, you know, it was used to justify getting rich. Our district wants us to say things, and they want to make sure everything's connected to standards. And if we do that, they have told us they will protect us.”

In this example, Marie described having to read sections of the student handbook aloud to her students promising that she would not make them feel “prejudiced” because of their race (a nod to white guilt) and that she would not critique meritocracy, the idea that if you work hard enough, you will be able to succeed, an essential underpinning of the “American Dream” which Marie laughingly admitted she had already “broke” having recently taught about Social Darwinism from a critical stance. In describing this event, Marie also noted her students’ reactions,

many of whom were AP students or “children of professors,” who just kind of “scoffed at the whole thing.” This example showcases both the structural constraints forced upon teachers in real time, where they must humbly submit themselves to students’ various ideological premises, and at the same time, demonstrates the ways in which teachers can and do work within the system. For Marie, her dry recounting of this event along with her blatant admission at having broken the promise regarding meritocracy illuminates the complexity with which teachers are being forced to navigate the system.

This example pointedly illustrates what Clarke (2015) described as a “complex and heteroglossia context, crowded by many common senses,” which “requires the work of listening: paying attention to what circulates, to what matters, to what connections are already being forced to what threads are being forgotten and to what apparently natural and normal alignments of things are coming apart” (Clarke, 2015, p. 284). In Marie’s example the anti- “CRT” discourses circulated alongside critique of the anti-“CRT” in equal measure and despite adhering to the bureaucratic policies of reading the legislation aloud to her students, her frankness about its ridiculousness and her students’ “scoffing” reaction constituted an act of creative insubordination where humor punctured the power of the institutional discourse.

In a final example, Mia, another teacher from a western, politically conservative state that was in the process of passing anti- “CRT” legislation, provided perhaps the most pointed example of drawing students’ attention to suppression, which conveyed a host of meanings to students about race, the United States, conservative parents, and

state policy, without any explicit reference as such. In this example, Mia recounted her lesson on imperialism and her response to a student's question about whether American imperialism was connected to racial superiority, explaining:

I said, oh, I cannot answer that question...I can't...I won't even mention that word... And so several students were like, 'Wait, what did she say? What did she say?' ...And I said, I can't bring that up. *You* can bring it up, but I'll leave you to make the conclusion. But you should know I cannot talk about that issue without creating a firestorm for myself. If any of you should choose to go home and say that I said there was anything to do with racial superiority and imperialism... And so, most of the students knew what I was saying without me saying it. And so, they don't like that, they're like, that is stupid...why can't you talk about what is real?

In this example, Mia showcases Hall's notion of articulation. To begin, in stating, "I can't bring that up," but "*You* can bring it up" Mia distinguished herself from her students' power, redrawing the lines of who has power in the relationship and subverting the traditional teacher-student hierarchy. By pointing this tension out, Mia also rearticulated the terms of their relationship- both acknowledging the students' power in the dynamic, while also retaking control in her own way in her implicit critique of the "firestorm" that would be invoked should they "choose to go home" and share that she had said "anything to do with racial superiority and imperialism." In a Gramscian sense, the war of position shows up in the shifting alliances drawn-

first a gap between Mia and her students, then a redrawn alliance between them against “home,” and finally, in their question “Why can’t you talk about what’s real,” an implicit alliance against the state.

On an additional level, in her expressed unwillingness to “answer that question” and “even mention that word,” Mia sent a message to her students that accentuated the initial question about the connection between imperialism and racial superiority; in her refusal, she inescapably staked her claim in the connection between these two ideas, making the connection between imperialism and racial superiority all the more clear for her students. The countervailing silence invoked Freire’s (1970) notion of counter silences. By naming the silence, and refusing to answer their questions, Mia effectively disrupted the dominant narrative and, like Lauren, forced her students to confront questions of why some knowledge has been deemed off limits for them, surfacing their own critiques— “that is stupid, why can’t you talk about what is real?” In this example, Mia wielded the silences imposed by her state legislature loudly, conveying to her students not only the connection between race and imperialism but also silently invited critiques of the gag order imposed by the state and the other forces that prevented students from learning certain content— an implicit indictment of many actors, includes many of the students’ parents.

In sum, Marie, Lauren, and Mia each drew attention to the various suppressions forced upon them by legislative decree. They did so by highlighting the ridiculousness of the laws through humor, by asking pointed questions about content and why one might want to ban it, and by giving space for research to answer

students' questions without the teachers' imprint. Each of these pedagogical choices reconfigured the effects of institutional and/or bureaucratic impositions and re-articulated the terms of the anti- "CRT" debate for students, conveying pointed messages to them about the role of race and racism in society and the students' own role within those debates.

Synthesis/ Discussion

While much has been reported about the anti- "CRT" legislation across the United States, less is known about how specific teachers are impacted and how they are navigating this fraught political moment. Findings from this study challenge generalizations about different states and assumptions that policy equally affects all teachers in the same ways. Instead, this study showcases the hyperlocal, specific ways that policies and public discourse are taken up by different actors in response to mobilization efforts circulating through a variety of rightwing political formations—both inside and outside of official politics.

This research also surfaces the importance of community context, which either conferred or stymied teachers' power to teach about race and racism in the ways that they desired, highlighting teachers' creative insubordination—the ways that they continued to teach about race and racism, even in the most hostile of contexts. By and large, the teachers in this study stood staunchly opposed to the anti- "CRT" rhetorical onslaught and most reported their teaching to be generally unchanged by their particular climates, although some in particularly constrained contexts described their navigation of these new limitations which meant that they had to avoid certain

concepts and buzzwords, and in some cases, alter the stories that they were teaching. Teachers described their acts of discursive re-articulation in the face of constraint, showcasing the ways in which they wielded denial, transparency, silence, and attention to suppression that worked in counter-hegemonic ways.

In many ways, these moves enabled teachers to touch on race-related content that would have otherwise been foreclosed and to implicitly critique the power structures responsible for said constraint. Yet, this careful curation and tactical deployment of particular words versus others also raises questions about the protection of the status quo and who these efforts ultimately protected most. Did, for example, Stuart's refusal to talk whiteness with his students for fear of invoking their own rage at identity indictment ultimately harm the larger project of racial justice? Or did this choice enable him to effectively carry on with his antiracist goals in ways that his student population would be able to tolerate? Did this work in favor or against the interests of his students of color? Who were the protected parties and why? Similarly, was Susan's refusal to full-throatedly explore the concept of American exceptionalism with her students ultimately a hindrance to their larger understandings of America on the world stage? Or was her re-articulation to "post WWII America" a strategic choice that offered more opportunities for students' being led to water but not forced to drink (a reference to Lauren's earlier comments). Slack (1996) asserted that "identities, practices, and effects generally constitute the very contexts within which they are practices, identities or effects" (p. 125). Does this then mean that if the practices are self-reproducing in certain ways that they simply recreate the status quo?

Or is this the way to achieve hegemonic power?

In his essay on Gramsci, Hall (1989) explained that “the actual social or political force which becomes decisive in a moment of organic crisis will not be composed of a single homogenous class but will have a complex social composition” (p. 311). From this standpoint, the questions I raise lack easy answers. Instead, the articulations and re-articulations— the discursive clashes that each of these teachers waged (e.g., the Gramscian wars of position) represent the contextually-specific and locally-bound conditions within which teachers found themselves. Ultimately, the choices these teachers made amidst the competing discourses and circumstances were consequential for themselves as actors and for their students' consciousness. As Hall (1989) noted, these articulations and re-articulations, in the specific moments in which they were enacted, yielded “intelligible meanings,” entered “the circuits of culture” that “shape[d] the understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations” and constructed them as “potential social subjects,” with the effect of organizing the ways in which they come to or form consciousness of the world” (p. 49). In their acts of creative insubordination, teachers acted upon the world, effectively altering the political terrain, even through silence. Even when they did not think they were being political, their discursive choices likely had implications for the messages conveyed to students about the role of race, racism, etc. in their lives and in witnessing their teachers' varied responses/tactics for confronting the sociopolitical affronts, the students inevitably learned lessons from their teachers— about the power of the state; about the

need to confront and/or deny for purposes of self-protection; in the changing of course, or in remaining silent. These signal larger lessons for students about what it means to participate in a democracy and the various reactions one might have/take to incursions. All of these questions and models are substantive when it comes to students' comprehensive racial learning and provide larger lessons about who wields power in society, implicating civic participation and democracy.

In the next chapter, I detail one more deliberate strategy of creative insubordination: the use of disciplinary-specific history pedagogy to teach about race and racism in ways that protected themselves while also raising students' consciousness.

Chapter 7: Teachers' Employment of History-Specific Disciplinary

Antiracism

Overview

While the prior chapter explored how history teachers in the study navigated their varying sociopolitical contexts regarding anti- "CRT" movements, highlighting their different efforts at re-articulation and creative insubordination, in this chapter, I home in on the ways that teachers drew upon history-specific disciplinary practices— what I term “history-specific disciplinary antiracism,” or disciplinary antiracism for short— to teach about race and racism. Using de Certeau’s (1984) theory of strategies and tactics, I show how teachers used disciplinary practices selectively based on their historical knowledge, their antiracist commitments, and the particularities of their sociopolitical context. Importantly, disciplinary practices on their own were not necessarily innately critical, and instead, were made critical by history teachers through their tactical deployments of them— either as a means to self-protect amidst a hostile environment, or as a vehicle to further antiracist commitments.

Jay’s (2022) review of the field of history/social studies education research related to teacher education found that there were distinct divides between the critical and disciplinary camps where researchers approach their work with either a social justice or a skills-based focus. Summarized by Santiago & Dozono (2022), the skills-focused historical inquiry camp draws upon a tools-oriented approach to inquiry which includes disciplinary practices like sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, and close reading (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011). By contrast, within the

critical historical inquiry camp, “criticality takes the form of approaching history with attention to power and privilege,” which emphasizes understanding how power functions throughout the process of studying history (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 181). Despite these disjunctures, Santiago & Dozono (2022) emphasized the need for a bridging of the disciplinary and critical camps, arguing that historical inquiry at its core is already critical in that it forces the consideration of perspectives, context, and in pursuing open questions, furthers a democratic project. Because the current anti “CRT” landscape has targeted the critical camp’s focus on antiracism, social justice, and the representation and inclusion of minoritized voices, this chapter details the ways in which teachers, in addition to common disciplinary practices like sourcing, contextualization, and close reading (Wineburg et al., 2011), operationalized the disciplinary modes of historiography, historical inquiry, and historical consciousness in critical ways that have escaped perception as potentially threatening by right wing constituencies and/or pushed their students, parents, and/or school communities towards anti-racist ends, both intentionally and not.

I begin this chapter by synthesizing Santiago & Dozono’s (2022) argument regarding the innate criticality of history. Then, using de Certeau’s theorizing of strategy and tactics, I detail teachers’ key disciplinary tactics—some of which were intentionally invoked to stave off or circumvent critiques as part of efforts at creative subordination, and others which were employed simply as the result of skilled teachers’ expertise, views of best practices for teaching history, or commitments to antiracist teaching via history. I term these strategies “history-specific disciplinary

antiracism,” an approach that speaks to Santiago & Dozono’s (2022) call for history education research to explore the interconnections and overlaps between historical thinking/disciplinary approaches and criticality. The practices I describe include the primacy of primary sources, pedagogies of choice, localized racial reckoning, and critical historiography. I then explore a few scenarios where the disciplinary approach fell short of critically engaging power relations and instead ended up reinforcing problematic racialized understandings and strategically supporting the status quo. I close with a discussion of how these examples can serve as potential models for teachers nationwide, the limitations of the approach, and grapple with implications for teacher educators.

History is Critical

In his review of research on teacher education in the field of history/social studies education, Jay (2022) found that there are consequential disjunctures with respect to the lenses that researchers apply to their work. Drawing upon Fallace’s (2017) research on the intellectual histories of social studies education, Jay identified three major silos: the traditional stance, which focuses on knowledge transmission of a “proscribed body of essential cultural knowledge,” imparting a fixed, often nationalistic interpretation of history (p. 343); the disciplinary stance, which emphasizes the cognitive elements of “doing history,” with the intent to prepare students to “think like historians,” (Wineburg, 2001), and the critical or progressive strand, which holds that knowledge is constructed, fluid, and dynamic, and that the purpose of social studies is to confront “hegemonic power structures” along the lines

of race, gender, Indigeneity, and other social markers (Jay, 2022, p. 344). Jay found the latter two strands— the disciplinary and critical— to be most representative of the type of research being conducted within the field of history/social studies, and while he focused on teacher education specifically, he extrapolated that other areas of history/social studies are similarly divided. Still, in spite these surface-level gaps, Santiago & Dozono (2022) asserted that there need not be such strict cleavages between the cognitive and critical camps based on their shared commitments to deconstructing knowledge construction and interrogating sources and asking questions about how “power functions throughout the studying of history” (p. 181). They argued:

There are specific skills necessary to analyze how systems of power and oppression function in history. We believe criticality and historical thinking are part of the larger process of critical historical inquiry and justice oriented social studies. They are not the same, but they could be all part of the same effort (p. 184).

While Santiago & Dozono (2022) acknowledged the differences between the disciplinary and critical camps, they also defended historical inquiry against critiques of being apolitical, contending that “framing historical inquiry solely as a cognitive exercise obscures its embedded criticality,” a nod to the work that historians do in interrogating perspectives, positionality, and available source material, all of which connect to larger systems of power (p. 183). Still, for Dozono (2022) there is room to

push disciplinary frameworks further, especially when it comes to working with students of color, arguing that historical thinking risks denying students' own racialized experiences and sense making arguing, "If I train students to act like historians, I might... discipline them to suspend their particular experiences in order to reach a universally objective understanding of the past" (p. 469). Moreover, teachers who dismiss the "traumatic relationships various communities of color have to history," risk reproducing "disciplinary violence that actively cloaks racial injustices today and their legacies in the past (p. 468). In this argument, Dozono (2022) pushed for a framework that could complement mainstream historical thinking pedagogy in ways where students of color have tools to "confront and historicize their experiences in a racialized world" and understand the ways in which their identities are implicated in the larger historical landscape of coloniality and enslavement (p. 468).

Relatedly, Castro (2022) found that students' racialized experiences can nuance schematic narrative templates, though the degree to which this happens is not guaranteed and dependent on the ways in which instruction invites pushing against dominant narratives along with the entrenchment of certain schematic narrative templates (e.g., the racial progress of the Civil Rights Movement). As Castro (2022) asserted, students with minoritized identities "deserve to develop an intellectual toolkit to interpret, challenge, and reframe how their communities are represented." Thus, with Santiago & Dozono's (2022) call for imbrication of the disciplinary and critical strands of history/social studies education in mind, in the next sections, I

describe various elements of teacher's history-specific disciplinary antiracism— the ways in which they operationalized certain historical thinking and other disciplinary practices to teach about race and racism even under hostile sociopolitical conditions. Importantly, as I describe in the space below, teachers did not always invoke disciplinary practices as a means to subvert the conservative status quo.

Strategies and Tactics

De Certeau's (1984) theorizing of the differences between strategy and tactics is helpful in understanding the actions of teachers in this study who differently drew upon disciplinary practices, some purposefully using them to subvert recrimination and others just because they believed these to be part and parcel of the disciplinary practice of history. For de Certeau (1984), interested in the practices of everyday life, of primary concern is the "battles or games between the strong and the weak," and particularly, the ways in which those without official power draw upon the dominant to "maneuver within the enemy's field of vision" (p. 37). Occupying the position of strength, he defined strategy as "a calculus of force-relationships" which "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (xix). Strategies require power as a precondition and seek to create places in conformity with abstract models (p. 29). Military strategy is one prime example of what de Certeau meant by strategy— backed up weaponry, organized people, and state legitimacy, the military can act nimbly in an effort to surprise and subdue their enemies, choosing when and how to impose upon spaces and make them their own.

By contrast, de Certeau articulated tactics as the art of the weak, taking “calculated action determined by the absence of power” (p. 37) whereby individuals “continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them,” (p. xix) using the constraining order, making something out of what is imposed. De Certeau explained, “without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity” (p. 30). While strategies “produce, tabulate, and impose” upon spaces, tactics “can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces,” and does so by establishing within the dominant space, a “degree of plurality and creativity” (p. 30). Exemplifying the workings of tactics, de Certeau (1984) described the ways in which in the face of Spanish colonization, Indigenous peoples “metaphorized the dominant order,” making it “function in another register,” by using colonial impositions “in service of rules, customs, or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape” (p. 31).

Taking these ideas into account, under constrained sociopolitical conditions, some of the teachers in this study explicitly described using disciplinary practices like primary sources, multiple perspectives, and historiography as a defense against parents, districts, and other potential detractors. In these cases, these teachers were working tactically— thinking about how their curricular and instructional moves might be interpreted and how they might defend themselves and their work. Notably, not all teachers drew upon these practices intentionally as acts of antiracism or self-protection. In fact, in some cases teachers used the strategic parts of disciplinary

history practices simply because they were considered the proper ways to teach history. While disciplinary practices could be considered counter-hegemonic tactics in their own right as they subvert traditional, transmission-based understandings of history education, in this case, their growing presence in state standards, curricula, and recognition as common instructional has conferred a sense of legitimacy (considered to be “proper”) that though at times protective, in some cases, was accommodated into the existing social order, becoming a tool of the dominant, drawn upon as strategy rather than tactic.

The Primacy of Primary Sources

The use of primary sources is a defining element of a disciplinary approach to teaching history and widely considered to be a prevailing best practice in the field. For some of the teachers in this study, primary sources served an interlocutory purpose, wielded tactically, allowing them to delve into content they could not necessarily speak on their own accord using their own voice to express their own opinions. In some cases, the use of sources provided cover that they could invoke when questioned. For example, Leo, who taught in a diverse school in a midwestern suburb expressed, “When I got these types of people [parents concerned about “CRT”], if I present them with a primary source, what are they going to say to me?”

Along similar lines, Olivia, who taught in a predominantly white suburb in midwestern state that had passed anti- “CRT” legislation described using primary sources as her “star,” asserting, “I’m almost ready for them to come for me, like, just try it...because I constantly will go to the primary sources.” She gave an example of

how her students engage with primary sources through reading excerpts from “Solomon Northrup’s 12 Years a Slave,” “Ain’t I A Woman?” by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass’ “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” and maps produced by the University of Richmond featuring interactive data on forced migration from 1810-1860. She defended her stance:

You can’t argue with those, those are their words. And that’s why I told my kids, I said, we are going to look at their words. We are going to understand what slavery was like from their perspective and if anybody comes for me, which I am sure they will, I’m waiting for it. That’s what I will rest on. That is the hill I am willing to die on— these are primary sources and these are their stories that deserve to be told and these are part of our history and I’m not going to eliminate them just because they’re not fun to look at.

In this example, Olivia used primary sources as a line of defense against possible detractors, asking, “if people come for me, what are they going to say to that? How do you argue with that?” Embedded in this explanation is a commitment to drawing out the voices conveyed in this set of sources- Black historical actors with critical perspectives on the United States and the institution of slavery, and embedded within that, an underlying commitment to teaching history that offers alternative perspectives to glamorized or whitewashed views of the U.S rather those that are “fun to look at.”

Leo voiced a similar commitment to infusing the teaching of slavery with the

truth and described his strategy to avoid accusations of “bias” on what he deemed as controversial topics (slavery, the Holocaust, Columbus). For “heavy, controversial topics,” he stated, “I pretty much go straight to primary sources... That’s an area that’s very ripe for bias, and so to keep my mantra of, I don’t see neutrality, but just presenting reputable sources, let the kids figure it out. It’s not me to, you know, go up there and spout off...”

Leo’s explanation demonstrates the competing forces informing his use of primary sources. For one, he invoked the term “controversial” in conjunction with other adjectives like “heavy” which he describes as “ripe for bias,” which connoted a sense of external critique, or at least the possibility of being critiqued as biased, raising questions about for whom these topics are considered controversial. Scholars (Jones, 2022) have talked about how framings like “hard history” cater to the white gaze, rather than to Black people and other people of color for whom all of history might be considered “hard.” Additionally, “bias” presents its own set of disciplinary connotations (e.g., perspective) and both charitable and uncharitable uptake by different actors concerned with distortions stemming from the media, along with other systems. Regardless of Leo’s rationale for why particular “heavy” topics would be deemed controversial, his strategy for responding relied on “reputable” primary sources so that students could form their own conclusions, without him playing a role in their interpretations or “go[ing] up there and spout[ing] off.” In this sense, like Olivia, the sources provided Leo with a sense of protection against accusations of being politically motivated and enabled him to tackle historically traumatic events

without fear of reprisal. Still, one wonders about his use of “repute” to determine sources’ validity and what/how sociohistorical power relations informed the decisions he made about what to include.

Michelle also relied on primary sources to assuage her own discomfort with representing Black voices and other perspectives that she did not feel otherwise comfortable voicing herself. She explained feeling more confident discussing historical issues of racism as opposed to modern day examples of systemic racism:

So I don't want to speak on behalf of like Black Americans today, although I can sympathize... So it does get weirder when I have to talk about like prison populations today or the overrepresentation of Black Americans who are getting arrested or stopped or whatever, or when we're talking about affirmative action or whatever. Mostly, I feel uncomfortable because I'm like, this isn't my story to tell. When I'm playing historian, it's like, well, I'm telling the stories of people who are dead and they can't tell [them]. I'm using their words. I'm used to it. I feel very comfortable doing that, and I think I've never had students respond negatively to me doing that.

In this excerpt Michelle conveyed her discomfort with taking on contemporary racism in her classroom because she was not sure how to navigate expressing current Black perspectives. By contrast, “playing historian,” enabled her to take on topics that she otherwise considered off-limits because of her own lack of ease with discussing modern systemic racism, either because of her conservative, rural, Southeastern

context, or because of lack of desire to reinscribe stereotypes of tell stories that were not her own. One way that Michelle assuaged her unease was by relying on evidence asserting, “I know where all the primary sources are.” She described her “biggest aid and tool and weapon” as “being able to confront a much more difficult narrative of American history,” by finding “all the dark corners” which “we’ll just stick our heads right in... because I know so much about it and I’m very confident in that knowledge.” Michelle attributed this expertise to her master’s degree in U.S. history, which gave her the confidence to broach topics she otherwise would not have known.

Feeling comfortable acknowledging racism in the past while failing to describe ongoing racism of the present day is a common racist practice of many white people, which buys into a narrative of racial progress (King, 2018). In this case, while Michelle acknowledged her discomfort, she also noted that she still does talk about present day racism because she knew “it still needs to be said” though largely in her psychology classes. She reiterated relying on evidence via academic studies to surmount her own discomfort, noting, “it feels fine as long as I’ve got the evidence...I mean you can question me, but it’s right there.”

Carla also relied on primary sources to convey perspectives outside of her own white racial identity explaining,

As a white person teaching in a school that is predominantly not white, I think the way to teach that is through primary sources because I can't speak for somebody who has a different lived experience. So I think primary sources work really, really well. So I just am really mindful of whose voices are in

those primary sources. And is that actually a representation of the United States or is it who has power? And so I try to make it more representative of the population of the United States versus just who wields power.

Here Carla drew upon primary sources to account for places so that she did not have to “speak for somebody” with a different racialized experience. She described doing large amounts of outside reading and looking expansively to find primary sources that ran counter to dominant narratives, particularly around Indigenous histories and histories excluded from traditional historical archives. She also emphasized that she always offers multiple perspectives and puts them together in conjunction with other sources to showcase a more complex and nuanced historical telling.

Lauren, who taught in a Southeastern state, used primary sources, including the founding documents, to lead students to more critical historical understandings because as she explained, “it turns out the founders and some of the other people...definitely do let you know what they thought.” For example, when talking about racism with her middle school students in her specialty courses on Native American and African American history, she explained examining the original Declaration of Independence raising questions for students like “where does it mention slavery?” And “look at that, it does mention ‘merciless Indian savages,’ like what does this look like?” In another example, she described reading the Cornerstone Speech with her students, stating, “if you want to know what the Confederates thought like, they wrote it down.” For her, being in “a former Confederate state”

made it important to use primary documents because “it's like, this is what they said. And so that's something that's really...pretty much from the get-go,” meaning that the written sources provide irrefutable evidence laying out the truth of pro-slavery aspirations in the lead up to the Civil War and really from the “get-go” of the founding of the nation. Here, Lauren spoke to the critical interpretations of the United States that inevitably accompanied looking closely at and asking particular questions of the founding documents. In the practice of closely examining the language and intent of these original documents, Lauren was able to lead students to critical assessments without bringing in additional content that might be potentially inflammatory. Ariella summed up the position well:

You're mad because I gave students documents and they made these conclusions out of these documents. I don't know what else you want me to say. I'm using the documents you said you wanted me to use even. And these are still the conclusions that they draw from these documents.

In a variety of ways, the teachers included in the above section represent Bakhtin's theory of double-voiced discourse whereby they drew upon official or authoritative discourses (in this case, the widespread disciplinary practice of using primary sources) to express particular opinions while simultaneously taking into account the possibility of counterparts' critiques and/or concerns (Landay, p. 108). Bakhtin argued that “we craft our utterances in dialogue in anticipation of the response of those with whom we are in dialogue” (Lee, p. 130). From the perspective

of de Certeau (1984), these teachers drew upon accepted disciplinary strategies— in this case, the use of primary sources— in tactical ways in order to introduce students to the potential hypocrisies of the nation’s founders without having to say so directly and to take on topics related to race and racism that they viewed as outside of their personal purview to speak to. Thus, for Leo, Olivia, Lauren, and Ariella, they dealt with real and potential criticism and attacks by wielding primary sources—invoking the “official” of both the disciplinary practice of primary sources, and the official words of the sources themselves— as one form of protection against outside forces.

Additionally, the invocation of primary sources to speak to experiences outside of their own reflects Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of heteroglossia or the use of another’s voice to “express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (p. 324). For teachers like Michelle and Carla, their discomfort as white people speaking for past and current historical actors of color led them to rely on primary sources to allow these actors to speak for themselves. In this way they were able to capture the “authorial intentions” or their words, while also maintaining distance in a “refracted way.” By the same token, Lauren was able to enact a similar dynamic by highlighting the speeches of the founders and other white leaders; and Olivia raised up the voices of Black historical actors. By letting historical actors’ voices speak for themselves, teachers were able to illuminate historical complexities for students and enable more critical interpretations that they would have otherwise been able to.

Pedagogies of Choice

Choice was another tactic employed by teachers that drew upon disciplinary-

specific history/social studies practices and helped to evade or neutralize parental, administrative, and larger social critique. In a variety of ways, teachers relied on student choices to enable them to pursue their own interests through inquiry, a core history-specific disciplinary tenet (Jay 2022). For example, Zeke, who taught at a STEM-focused magnet middle school in a progressive Western city incorporated choice throughout his project-based curriculum, which gave students a chance to learn about topics that interested them, often leading them to pursue topics related to race and racism. He explained: “Abortion rights, climate change, gun control— both for and against...My thinking is to not tell them what to think but teach them how to think.” One channel that he used to incorporate critical inquiry through choice was through National History Day, an annual project-based contest in which schools nationwide opt to participate. He explained how race and racism had been taken up in the context of students’ inquiries:

This last year, a lot of the rights for Black Americans were talked about, how we need to reform policing, or reallocate money and things like that...And so we're talking about the debate over equity and housing, right? So here's this diplomatic law that effectively segregates and gives loans to white people, but not to Black people. And so they're diving into the [city] archives, they're looking at the maps...

While Zeke encouraged critical inquiries into topics of students’ choosing, he also emphasized his focus on skills-based instruction:

There is no way to teach all of U.S. history in a course...but if I can teach them the skills of how to ask the questions, how to conduct research, how to find out whether a source is valid and reliable and relatable and how to cite their sources, then those are transferable to any subject matter, anywhere. And that's the skills that they will have for the rest of their life.

Zeke rarely faced parent pushback: “In fact, most of the time it's the opposite. I have parents literally calling me or emailing me, thanking me for teaching about these things.” And when faced with criticism or challenge, he was “willing to go to the mat,” giving an example of a parent complaining about their child taking a voluntary survey related to trans rights, in response to which he defended his stance and reiterated the protective barrier provided by choice. He explained:

Look, your child already A) had class with me, and you know that I'm going to allow the kids to explore this. I go, that's not me teaching. B) This was completely voluntary. Your child did not have to either a) fill out the survey at all or b) fill out that question if they felt uncomfortable with it...and so a lot of it is giving the students the voice within all of this and giving them the choice because I'm not choosing, ultimately, I'm not choosing what they're studying with those topics. I'm just facilitating the learning.

Zeke's defense reflects an underlying commitment to student agency, asserting that they indeed have choices and determinative power to decide what questions they answer, whether they complete surveys at all, and their topics of study. By claiming a

role as “facilitator” rather than as the one “choosing,” Zeke was able to claim plausible deniability— that he was not responsible for students’ choices, and that that was, in fact, the point: “I don't shy away from [these topics]. In fact, I want kids to tackle those topics because we need to challenge perceptions.

In another example, Eric, who taught in a diverse 6-12 northeastern magnet school also followed a project-based curriculum which allowed students to explore topics related to race and racism in depth throughout their course. He described his project-based pedagogy whereby students select topics, pick sources, conduct secondary and primary source research, develop a thesis, and create and present their projects. For him, this style works better than “me, standing and delivering and this is [my] interpretation of the event.” He elaborated:

I'm really getting them to grapple with the different events, select their own sources for the most part and just me like to intervene and be a facilitator in the process. I don't like being the one that just tells them the way it is. That's like never been my approach when I started out teaching... I really don't like to be direct about my own political beliefs and ideology.

He explained how choice enabled his students, particularly his African American students, a new level of access to history guided by their own interests:

I had African-American students in particular who've spoken about how this is the first class where they actually get to study the history of black people... every marking period, they could theoretically pick some sort of topic related

to African-Americans and African-American history. We could still tie it to these broader themes that we're looking at but they're able to grapple with ideas of slavery, of all different sorts of discrimination, and such.

Not only did this pedagogical strategy enable Eric to avoid having to impose his historical interpretations on students and “be the one giving them the answer,” but Eric’s employment of choice during every marking period allowing students to choose the lenses through which they answered the unit’s essential question speaks to Dozono’s (2022) call for teachers to cultivate and incorporate students of color’s racialized experiences into their curriculum and to reckon with contemporary movements including George Floyd’s murder, Ferguson, and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Through choice, Eric was able to attend to the task of not just making “room in the curriculum for racialized experience, but more importantly to give students tools to historicize their racialized experiences... [which] also means historicizing the present, and how one identifies themselves across sociopolitical matrices of power.” (Dozono, 2022, p. 469).

Francesca relied on choice to account for curricular silences and to enable students to locate histories outside of the dominant narratives, particularly given her sense of limitation based on her own identity as a white woman. She explained her rationale,

One of the things that we're looking at in our curriculum audits is who's writing the materials that you're giving. Is it still more white guys that are

writing historical narratives about African Americans? Or are you really elevating African American authors writing about African American history or other history?... So really looking at not only are we representing the stories of a variety of identities, but are we also representing authorship from a variety [of identities]?... Then we say to [students], whose stories aren't we hearing? Who/what is not being represented here? What are we missing? And then sometimes, not always, but give them time to say, okay, you've got 15 minutes to find a story we haven't talked about from a perspective we haven't talked about and letting them run with that.

The choice and space to investigate various social groups' histories was incorporated both in class, via allowing students space to locate missing perspectives in class and in their summer reading assignments, where students were instructed to choose two or three different introductions from survey-style histories where titles included *A Queer People's History of the United States* (Bronski, 2019), *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), and other secondary source historical works modeled on Howard Zinn's (1980) *A People's History of the United States*. In reading these introductions, her students, like the authors, "grapple with this question of whose story are we telling and why are we telling it?" Along with questions of "why and how are we segmenting out these histories, like why is there a need for a Black Women's History of the United States as a separate book and not integrated into a larger book?" Ultimately these questions lead students to the point that "we're not there yet, where to my knowledge, there's a

textbook out there that fairly represents the multiple complex stories of all these different identities and de-centers whiteness...”

By empowering students to choose and pursue histories for further engagement, Francesca and her colleagues sought to capture the complexities of historical questions. For example, she explicated,

If we're doing a moment in time through the lens of opportunities and barriers to the American dream.... We have a plethora of examples of all kinds of opportunities for all these different identities and their stories and different experiences and narratives and building this idea that this is complex. We can't just say this is the Asian-American experience of this is the Black experience or this is the white experience, there are so many layers to what that experience is.

In this example, Francesca sought to complicate notions of shared group identities, which Dozono (2022) argued, “risks concretizing identity categories which could preclude other inquiries into racialized experiences.” He cautioned that merely “writing new histories that validate marginalized peoples, which simultaneously reifies the power of colonization and its categories. Identity remains a trap” (p. 474). Thus, by layering counter histories on top of each other, Francesca attempted to stymie the tendency towards essentialization. Not only does the emphasis on counter narratives draw students' attention to historical complexity where they are coming from, “like, holy crap, I had no idea this story existed because I've been told this

narrative my whole life, who else is missing?” But it also enabled Francesca to guide students in engaging questions of their own personal identities and coalescences between the histories they are confronting:

I teach again at an overwhelmingly white school and I'm white. But recognizing that, for example, if we're talking about the Chicano movement, if we have one or more Latino students in the room, many of them know this story and know it well. And so how do we differentiate in ways that those students can find something new and fresh and not just assume that every human in the room needs and wants the same engagement with the materials. And so, finding ways to do that too.

Francesca's reliance on choice brought together criticality with historical inquiry guided by an understanding of dominant and counter narratives in ways that enabled students to understand themselves and others according to their different social positionings. This spoke to Dozono's (2022) urging that “rather than seek histories that redeem, historical thinking accountable to racialized experience must help students to uncover how history has made us ‘other’” (Dozono, 2022, p. 473). Francesca thought a lot about the needs of her students of color versus her white students and used strategic choice to guide each constituency towards increased consciousness, based on their zone of proximal development, cultural background, race, etc. all as a means to grapple with hegemonically imposed/enforced difference. Moreover, in having students reflect upon their own implications in the histories told

and untold, Francesca guided students in understanding how identity categories themselves are historically located, and shape “one’s experiences in the world” (Dozono, 2022, p. 479). While she was not under fire in the same way as other teachers in the study, and thus did not need to rely on choice to mask critical content, choice still played a key disciplinary intervention whereby she was able to differentiate her instruction to meet the diverse needs of her students and draw attention to the ways in which traditional history has been used to “subjugate non-white peoples through knowledge” (Dozono, 2022, p. 475).

Other teachers invoked choice more tactically to stave off parental critique. Arthur taught civics in a diverse northeastern city and relied on choice as part of the action-research projects his students conducted designed to improve their communities. In an example of how he responded to parent pushback, Arthur recounted how a group of students built consensus over several days of debate and ultimately decided to add a tax on vape products and use the revenue to pay for youth vape prevention programs in schools. When a parent reached out to say, “you know, Eddie doesn’t want to work on this project,” Arthur responded,

I said, let me go back and double check, and I looked and I take pictures of all the different [project] components. And there's Eddie over in the ‘I’m all for this project,’ [column] right? He's on that side of the continuum. And so I went back to the mom and I said, you know, I just went through my records and Eddie was a strong supporter of the project. And she said, well...our family doesn't support additional taxes. So it wasn't about Eddie. You know,

and I was very respectful, but I stood my ground.

Arthur continued:

Look... I understand, I appreciate your reaching out. But student voice is the most important part of this project...It doesn't matter... it's not my job to tell them [what topic to choose]. This is democracy in action. They need to come to their own decisions. They debate it, they discuss it...and this is what the class decided. So, this is what they're doing. And she backed down, fortunately.

In this example, Arthur situated students' choices amidst larger discourses of democracy where choice is the ultimate application of democratic thinking. While not explicitly about race or racism, by invoking the democratic refrain that the topic students ultimately choose is secondary to the actual process of deliberation, Arthur successfully eviscerated external critique and remained faithful to a core tenet of critical social justice-oriented history education (Sibbet & Au, 2017).

Along similar lines, Christina was also able to diffuse parental pushback on students' choices, this time by emphasizing the skill of using evidence to support an argument, regardless of what that argument may be. She recounted an assignment where students researched "anything they wanted," including topics like "police brutality and what that looks like— is it different for a person of color or a white person?" or, "voting rights— does everyone in America right now have the right to vote?" She explained,

Some of these topics, some of their parents wrote me and they were like, why is my sixth grader looking at this? And I could just say, they picked it. I didn't assign that topic, but if you're more comfortable, they could research something else. It led to some really great conversations.

In other cases, Christina faced more rigorous pushback out of fear that she was "presenting an agenda." She described one case where she was able to diffuse a complaint again about police brutality by reassuring a parent that "she's looking at ways to solve the problem" explaining that "her daughter was trying to write about how there could be more compassion between law enforcement and people in communities." In another case, Christina faced another parent opposed to her kid writing about police violence asserting that "we have people in our family who are in law enforcement." She explained her successful attempt to assuage the parent:

And I was like, That's great. What a great perspective. Can he interview his family member who's in law enforcement? Can he get their thoughts on some of the things that have been happening? That'd be a great perspective to take...And the mom, I think, was expecting me to be like, yeah, cops are bad. And I was like, I'm a public servant, like, I'm a public educator, like I totally get, there are people who love teachers, hate teachers, love cops, hate cops, so I was like you can take any point of view. My job is not to assess the perspective that your student is taking. My job is to assess, can your student think critically and communicate their thinking? And the parent was fine and

the kid wrote a paper about, you know, the problem wasn't the police. So even if I didn't agree with the student, that doesn't change the effectiveness of their paper or the letter that they wrote.

In these descriptions, Christina relied on the notion of student choice and disciplinary skills (writing, defending one's argument with evidence) as bulwarks against accusations of pushing agendas based on politicized topics (police brutality).

In each of the cases above, Zeke, Eric, Francesca, Arthur, and Christina showed how they differently drew upon choice to reinforce their disciplinary specific and/or critical commitments. In some cases, they situated the content of study as secondary to the skill-based foci they were working on developing with students. In nearly every example, the teachers also drew upon the "it's not my job to..." discourse, which again, was a way to create distance between students' interest in potentially "controversial" topics, or at least those perceived to be by parents. Here these teachers invoked choice both to serve their students' needs, but also to stultify parental upset. While choice and personal agency provided protection against critique which enabled students to pursue their inquiries around race, racism, etc., the defenses that some teachers offered (Zeke, Christina) did not challenge the assumptions underlying the parental critiques, nor did they put forth the argument that these topics are worthy of being taught and learned so that students better understand discrimination, injustice, etc. Ultimately this strategy ended up letting parents' arguments stand, imbuing them with legitimacy.

Moreover, as Barton & Ho (2022) have pointed out, the argument that critical

skill-development will inevitably lead to more critical analysis has not been borne out by research. In cases like these, the short-term benefits of stabbing off critique raise questions about the long-term utility of appeasement as a tactic and its potential risks of sustaining intolerance and censorship. Expanding on this point, that each of the teachers featured in this chapter allowed students to pursue their own inquiries is in line with one particular orientation to inquiry (e.g., Levstik & Barton, 2011) in which students have choices about what they learn about. This is not necessarily the most common approach to social studies inquiry, which often opts for prescribed and bounded inquiry questions that predetermine the topics and questions students pursue. Choice itself is mediated—embedded in the social, cultural, and political contexts within which students are positioned. Given this, criticality is not guaranteed when drawing upon student choice and thus, allowing students space to pursue their own inquiries and potentially confirm, rather than disrupt their particular ideologies could be considered a risky move by some teachers who view themselves as attempting to foster antiracist education in their classrooms, especially when allowing parents’ space to interrupt and/or influence the inquiries that students conduct. At the same time, as Arthur pointed out, democracy (via choice) *is* tied to criticality, and thus, drawing upon student choice, even when they take the side of the police (as was the case described by Christina), for example, still constituted a democratic project.

Localized Racial Reckoning

Helfenbein (2021), a critical geographer, argued that “spaces and places express ideologies, affective forces, and power relations, and are ontological processes filled

with living politics that shape who we are as subjects (p. 7). With this in mind, in this section, I describe the antiracist pedagogical practices of two teachers in the study, Susan and Frank, both of whom drew upon local histories to engage students in racial reckoning. While these practices were not necessarily implemented to respond to or stave off external critique, this strategy of localized reckoning was used to antiracist effect without inviting outside pushback or criticism, even in the case of Susan who shunned the identifier of “antiracist,” yet engaged local historical inquiry into monuments to lynching and race massacres with her students, in spite of her own resistance to antiracism and commitment to “unbiased” history. By contrast, Frank viewed himself as on a journey towards implementing antiracist pedagogies, citing himself as having gone through great transformation incited by the murder of George Floyd amidst the larger national backdrop of racial reckoning. For him, engaging in a local inquiry into the history of enslavement at his school was transformational both in terms of his own education and emergence as an antiracist educator, and for his students. Schmidt (2015) argued that “if injustice is written into space, then a curricular challenge is how to understand inequity through space and produce responses that reorganize space,” and indeed both Susan and Frank engaged this challenge even when denying doing so (p. 254).

Increased research attention has been paid to the possibilities of place-based inquiry in advancing students’ and pre-service teachers’ racial literacies (Duncan, 2021; Thacker & Bodle, 2022). Dillard et al. (2017) found that sites of racial trauma (in their case, slave dungeons in Ghana) can have profound impacts on pre-service

teachers' learning about the history and present impact of racism. Keenan (2019b) similarly located museums (in his case, Mission San Francisco) as sites that provide students with critical counter-stories that contest traditional whitewashed narratives of history. Thacker & Bodle (2022) studied the implementation of a place-based teacher preparation course which took place on a former plantation and inevitably invited teachers' "reflections on space, placemaking, and panoptic systems of discipline [that] were part and parcel to the experience of race reflection" (p. 405). Additional research also speaks to the utility of local history to engage students in inquiry-based instruction that "avoids the distortion tendencies decried by the critics of multicultural education (Danker, 2005, p. 112). Crocco & Marino (2017) argued that local history affords history teachers new and effective ways for engaging historical inquiry, enabling "genuine experiences of discovery using fresh material that typically has not been previously encountered in a pre-service teachers' preparation" (p. 3). In the next segments, I describe how Susan and Frank drew upon local history to engage their students in reckoning with the racialized imprint on their lives today.

Susan

Despite vehemently denying herself to be an antiracist teacher, Susan did admit that she used anti-racist materials in her southern school context which had both urban and rural elements and voiced a commitment to teaching about racial violence throughout her course, which she said she used to be fearful of doing, but now centers in her course content. She reported using the Tulsa Race Massacre as a segue into teaching about the more local atrocities, explaining how she "pulls the band-aid off,"

— where first students learn about the Lost Cause theory, which asserted states' rights as the reason for the Civil War and then watch a documentary about a young woman's investigation of her great grandfather's lynching, which took place in Susan's city where,

They start looking at the documents that are in the archives here in my city, and they realize that her great grandfather was lynched for no reason. And they've got images from this community like everybody will recognize the airport. She's coming off the plane in the airport...and then, I'll share statistics about lynching throughout the nation and how most of them were in the south.

After exploring the local example of a lynching, Susan shared how she teaches another local(ish) atrocity, the Colfax Massacre of 1873 which, after teaching for the first time, a few of her students drove two hours away to visit the monument with their own eyes. Their visit inspired Susan to take a detour from a Christmas festival to visit the site in “the middle of nowhere.” While there, she took pictures of the monument which informed how she approached teaching the event the following year. She explained her sequencing of teaching, students first read an article about “cold facts,” summarizing the event, discussing it, and then she shared about her trip, showing students pictures as she explained,

I popped the picture up there about the marker and everything, and I told them the story about it and how to be aware of the labeling and stuff.

The 'labeling and stuff' was in reference to the script of the public monument, which read:

On this site occurred the Colfax Riot in which three white men and 150 negroes were slain. This event on April 13, 1873 marked the end of carpetbag misrule in the South.

Susan went on to explain more about her trip to Colfax and guide students through analysis of the photo:

We talked about the carpetbag misrule and stuff and calling it a riot instead of a massacre. Then I told them... you remember in the article it talked about the monument? So this is in the cemetery, in this little old town, and if you look at this, it says 'erected to the memory of the heroes.' And then it goes on 'who fell in the Colfax riot fighting for white supremacy in 1873.' So we talked about that and...I said, why isn't that down? It finally came down in May of 2021. One of the white descendants of this massacre, he lives in Houston. They've been trying to get rid of it. The people in the state and community wasn't getting rid of it and finally, somebody who had roots in the community in Houston [did]...He's a white man who's had a granddaughter who is black who said, we've got to know the truth of this. And with him finally, with his roots in the area, they got it down. It's down. I don't think they've put a new monument up that I've seen yet...So the kids are like, oh my gosh.

In this anecdote, Susan recounted how she dissected the language of white supremacy with her students, engaging in discourse analysis examining uses of terms like “riot” rather than “massacre,” unpacking the meaning of “carpetbag misrule” and examining the rationale for the erection of the monument itself, built to honor those who “fell...fighting for white supremacy.” She ended by asking for students to consider the purpose of the monument and why it remained standing, noting that it was finally removed in 2021. In this example, Susan drew out students’ analyses to demonstrate how language and practices like memorialization were used to uphold white supremacy, though she did not use that language to describe her teaching commitments. Moreover, embedded in her question, “why isn’t it down yet?” was a covert admission of her own judgment that the memorial should be removed. While Susan was careful about inflammatory language (see Chapter 6), her quiet critique of white supremacy came through in her explanation of the monument and why it was eventually removed.

After talking about the Colfax Massacre, Susan engaged students in analyzing the language of memorialization through another local(ish) example, this time located in a neighboring Southern state, again using pictures of her visit there to situate the place for her students. She described stumbling upon a former school for freedmen that had been burned down. She took a picture of the memorial and later, in her hotel, read its text, which she went on to share with her students:

It talks about this free colored school... So, in 1865, there were nine schools here. All were burned during the May 1866 race riots...I said so, after

learning what we learned today [about Colfax], what do you think? Do you think this was a race riot? And so they talked about it...probably. I said, if I go back, if I dug up some stuff, I would find out that it was probably certainly just a burning, certainly not a riot. And perhaps if we went and did some digging, people died. And if people died, they were probably African-Americans trying to stop the burning of their schools. But I did tell them, I said, I don't know that, but the labeling is important and that things are changing.

In this retelling, Susan again engaged students in a discussion around the use of the term “race riot,” and when they tried to affirm the use of the term riot to describe the atrocity, Susan intervened in their interpretation, redirecting them towards an understanding of the power differentials that undoubtedly existed between the African Americans and those who burned down the schools. She also again affirmed her view that “labeling is important,” a nod to a view that language matters and also that “things are changing,” which spoke to her prior example about the recent removal of the Colfax monument.

Susan’s invocation of local history to teach about racial violence did not come without risks and proved to be emotional for both her and her students. She elaborated on the exhaustion that accompanied teaching about these topics 5-6 periods a day noting, “it’s just so emotionally draining.” On her Black students, she remarked, “I’ve had kids crying before and that's why I do need to tell them ahead of time and especially my Black students, you know?”

Like Francesca and other teachers in the study, Susan worried about the different experiences her students would have learning about racial terror, noting especially the effects on her Black students. At the same time, she reasoned, “if I don't present it, my white students aren't hearing it. I'm sure the Black students haven't heard it at school. But they know about it from home and church and stuff like that.” She also tried to counteract the depressing nature of racial terror by bringing in positive historical examples, especially local ones, giving the example of two African Americans who made an impact in their local community during Reconstruction, “so it's a positive kind of uplifting thing to end the unit with.”

In the above examples, Susan detailed how she used local historical events to provide students with deeper insights into larger historical phenomena, revealing how history is made and remade, or “comes to be written” (Crocco & Marino, 2017, p. 3), based on the “labeling” of particular events and the ways in which these events are memorialized. Though Susan stated that she did not engage her students in exploring the role that race plays in society today, her pedagogical use of local history to teach students about race massacres and lynchings, along with her guiding them through linguistic analysis of messages defending said atrocities speaks to the contrary— that Susan operationalized local, place-based history inquiry to antiracist effect. Despite her reluctance to take on an antiracist mantel, Susan, thus provides a tactical model for teachers in similar sociopolitical contexts where they might face hostility when broaching potentially inflammatory topics (e.g., the local area's history of racial terror).

Frank

While Susan's pursuit of local sites of racial terror led students to question the framing of historical events and the role of memorialization in promoting certain ideologically-inflected narratives, Frank's pedagogical implementation of racial reckoning did not require him to leave his school building. Upon learning about a possible relationship between his school and enslavement, Frank partnered with a local historian and invited his students to engage in archival research, tracing the imprint of enslavement on their school. He described this partnership as fundamentally altering the way that he approached teaching and the way he understood the world:

I remember reading, five years ago, an article... about the sale of ...people by the Jesuits... to rescue [a nearby college]... from financial ruin. And I teach at a Jesuit high school, I had no idea about this, and I was deeply shocked... I sent an email to the professor that was interviewed in the article and asked him if he would be willing to speak at [my school] and...he gave an amazing presentation and during the question and answer, one of my students stood up and asked him, is there any connection between [our school] and slavery? And he said, I don't know, but I would encourage you to come and look in the archives.

This prompted him to partner with students over four years to go through archival records, eventually finding that their school had started from profits from Jesuit-run

slave plantations. He elaborated:

From everything from the ground the school was built on. And then we identified five enslaved people that worked at the school, including a young boy named Gabriel, who was 14 at the year the school opened, which happens to be 200 years ago, right now, 1821...it hasn't been talked about for 195 years.

Frank noted the profound impact that this discovery had on him, "I always talked about... the history of enslavement, white supremacy, Jim Crow, you know, civil rights. Lots of that stuff, but this made it very, very real. This is a game changer. It's central to everything I teach now." Frank believed that learning that their school was started based on profits from plantations and there was an enslaved person their age altered the way his students understood history. He talked about Gabriel, the 14-year-old who worked at the school, frequently in his class:

They learn his story. I mean, we know now that he was then taken to [the local] College, where he was leased by a family ...in return for a discount on their kid's tuition. We know that he was offered a chance to buy his freedom. We found documents showing that he was paying off \$8 a month to ultimately earn his freedom. We know that his owner died and that he was sold for \$450. We know who bought him. We have the bill of sale. We know the ship that he was taken down to New Orleans on. We know how much he was valued when he arrived in New Orleans... We know his height, he was five foot three, so,

in addition to teaching this history, I have used Gabriel's story specifically as a way for my students to reckon with this and to grapple with it.

In this explanation, Frank detailed how he used the case of Gabriel as a vehicle through which students confronted the larger historical forces at play in shaping America, particularly around the legacy of enslavement. In the final assignment for the year, students wrote 16-line poems, many of which heavily featured Gabriel's story getting "right to the heart of America and our history." Learning about their school's racist history has opened up student discussions in extraordinary ways:

Now that we can openly talk about it...it has changed everything about how I teach just in terms of privilege... one of the main themes the students have when they learn this history is that they're really upset that nobody told them about it for so long. They can grapple with it, but the fact that it was kept from them really, really bothers them.

Beyond fundamental alterations to his teaching, Frank was committed to dedicating a permanent memorial garden to Gabriel and the school had, for the first time, held a school-wide mass discussing this history with its student body. Still, despite his acknowledgement that the school was moving in the right direction in reckoning with the past, Frank noted, the students and faculty agree, "we're not done yet."

The example of Frank demonstrates the ways that history-specific disciplinary practices, such as using the archives and document analysis, through which he and his students discovered so much about Gabriel's life, along with locally specific

inquiries, can be operationalized to reckon with racial violence. Dozono (2022) called upon teachers to “select historiographic sources which reflect their localized student population and the specific colonial contexts in which their classroom is located” (p. 481). Frank quite literally did just that— he led students to interrogate the history of their school walls, and grapple with the practices and relationships that inevitably led to their sitting in their classrooms. Santiago & Dozono (2022) proposed a vision that brings together historical thinking that is “not singular nor static but rather always shifting to the needs of distinct communities” (p. 185).

Frank took a more overt approach to antiracist local history by directing his focus squarely on the legacy of enslavement in his own school building. In revisiting the theorizing of de Certeau (1984), in taking on the history of his own institution, Frank engaged in a range of tactics that reconfigured the origin story of his school, its stated goals and practices, and quite literally transformed the space (e.g., the memorial garden). By contrast, despite Susan’s disinclination to claim antiracism as a teaching goal, and her wish to remain neutral, her use of local history did antiracist work regardless. While they did so differently, the efforts of Susan and Frank both tactically harnessed the legacies of enslavement and ongoing racial violence in its afterlife and guided students in reckoning with their primary sites of engagement as teachers— their community (Susan) and in the school itself (Frank). These two examples provide potential models for ways in which teachers in both hostile and friendly environments might approach wielding history to antiracist effect. Focusing on linguistic framing of historical events, exploring the archives, and critically

examining the presence, absence, and construction of monuments provide potential avenues for teachers to use history-specific disciplinary tactics to pursue questions of race and racism.

Critical historiography

Historiography concerns the methods employed by historians in the telling of history. It understands history to be a practice of piecing together sources towards the construction of particular narratives and its purpose as to “analyze the content that facilitates normative stories” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 188). The practice and process of historiography is always in flux, responsive to the currents of the day and the foci/lenses by which historians apply their analysis and interpretations. As the field changes based on contemporary cultural and sociopolitical developments and commitments, Dozono (2022) argued, “Historiography must be accountable for both legacies of white supremacy (Mills, 1997) and coloniality (Quijano, 2000) within the discipline,” applying criticality to push the study of and teaching of history in new directions (p. 472). He contended, historical inquiry that facilitates students’ deeper understandings of their world must “help students contextualize their racialized experiences in light of racial and colonial legacies” (Dozono, 2022, p. 468-9). Thus, in this section, I explore how the history teachers in this study critically engaged historiography to study race and racism in a variety of ways— drawing upon history-specific disciplinary strategies and tactics that involved covert criticality, interrogating perspectives, and dispelling traditional historical narratives.

Covert Criticality

As described in Chapter 6, Christina faced some of the most hostile teaching conditions in terms of anti- “CRT” efforts in the study and she viewed herself as under persistent threat should certain members of the opposition find out about her content. Christina taught ancient civilizations, which she attributed to why she had not yet been targeted for critical content: “they don’t pay any attention to me.” Still, despite focusing on ancient civilizations, Christina explained how she continued to bring in contemporary issues of race and racism, albeit covertly:

So I'm just about to start my unit on Mesopotamia. And my essential question revolves around geography, the importance of geography...So we look at the power of water for Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent, the Tigris, and Euphrates, how that allowed the civilization to flourish.... And then we pair that with Hurricane Katrina and what happened there and how water was not as successful as it was for people in Mesopotamia and as kids research that, then discuss that, and read about Katrina, a lot of great questions come up... Wow, a lot of black people lived in New Orleans. Wow, nobody really did anything for a really long time... And they are introduced to the term environmental racism. They read someone's argument that Hurricane Katrina is an example of that, and we analyze the text and determine if the author was able to defend their claim. It pairs nicely because we, as eighth grade historians, are learning how to better defend our claims with evidence. So, they dissect the argument of that historian. So I'm not teaching environmental

racism. I'm not telling them what to think about Katrina, but I am introducing themes and ideas of race and racism in America.

In this example, Christina explained how she linked the ancient civilizations around the Fertile Crescent with an inquiry into what happened with Hurricane Katrina, exposing students to ideas about race and racism in contemporary America. She invoked disciplinary skills like research, discussion, and textual analysis with the goal of defending claims with evidence. In dissecting the argument of historians and by framing her students as “historians,” Christina maintained a distance from the core content of the racism exemplified by Katrina, and thus, was able to claim that she was not teaching “environmental racism,” but rather preparing disciplinary practitioners. In this way, Christina covertly inserted criticality into her lesson under the guise of historical inquiry as an antiracist and protective tactic.

Tactical Interrogation of Multiple Perspectives

The use of multiple perspectives is a disciplinary mainstay and key component of historiography. Amongst the teachers in the study, the importance of using multiple perspectives to teach historical events was nearly ubiquitous and signified a major shift away from Fallace’s (2017) description of traditional social studies which tends to rely on a singular, often patriotic, historical interpretation. Here, I detail the practices and applications of teachers’ engagement with “multiple perspectives,” wherein they centered minoritized voices, questioned silences, and used new accounts to counter traditional historical narratives.

Delia had a great deal of autonomy over her curriculum and therefore viewed herself as a curator of sources, explaining:

I'm always selecting, I select what we read, you know, like I'm selecting what primary sources we're going to look at. I'm selecting what stories we might read. And so I become a curator of artifacts. So, it's like a museum and I'm choosing, these are the things that we can that we can look at.

She recognized her power as a teacher in both source selection and framing of historical explanations:

And there's so much power in how you talk about someone, you know, like if I'm going to talk about Tecumseh as being ...this total badass, you're like, oh my gosh, look what he did like... he claims to be speaking for the entire native continent and what an incredible leader he is.

Delia understood that the way that she framed her explanations shaped how students thought about these historical figures and used critical framing like “let’s air quote civilization” as a way to get students to interrogate larger structures of coloniality— “what does civilized really mean?” She explained:

And so, like when you give them that framework...It's powerful, and you can kind of curate the experience and show them you have a lot of choice over what artifacts they get to look at and choose to look at and what directions you can point them if they're curious.

Other teachers interrogated the types of silences that existed in the sources and narratives they were teaching. For example, Carla explained: “we’ll be like, okay, so where are the perspectives that maybe we’re not getting? And they’ll be like, oh, we don’t have a lot of women’s voices or Indigenous or African-American... I try to find new material to kind of reflect on where they see the holes.” Here she used missing perspectives as both an instructional practice for her students and as a tool for her own self-reflection, pushing her to incorporate more perspectives into her teaching.

Along similar lines, Polly described her goals of teaching about the structures of oppression, the resistance, and also teaching the “whole richness of humanity of individuals,” emphasizing the need to talk to students about “why there aren’t more examples,” a reference to the way that western knowledge construction and history making, up until recently, has privileged particular perspectives over others. She elaborated:

Those voices aren't there as much because historically, people had not... first of all, people didn't necessarily have as much access to the materials of history to have their voices heard at the time...it's only in, a lot of cases, in the 20th century when some of these voices have been searched for, it has to be actively searched for.

In this explanation, Polly explained how she surfaced questions of historiography with her students, describing why particular historical narratives and sources exist in lieu of others. In this framing, Polly acknowledged the western epistemic roots of the

discipline of history for students and described how she tried to subvert or complicate those notions with her students.

Dispelling Traditional Historical Narratives

Many teachers in the study described using multiple perspectives as a tactic to subvert traditional narratives. For example, to challenge and counter traditional histories about the founding fathers, Eric described his instructional goal to give students “an understanding of the early United States through the eyes of all these different people.” To do this, he used a young readers’ edition of a history written by Erica Armstrong Dunbar to explore the Washington family’s relentless pursuit of a girl they had enslaved, explaining that the book was able to foster daily conversations about race and because it was written by a Black woman, enabled the class to wrestle, “not only with our own story, but also with... the author's interpretation, how she told it and really making sure that we were being very sensitive, as well as thoughtful about her interpretation of the story she was trying to tell.”

Eric used discussions about interpretation and perspective, disciplinary strategies, as entries points into conversations about slavery that “were not just talking about this as a system of exploitation [but rather] ... about sexual violence towards enslaved people. We were talking about the ripping apart of families. We were talking about the idea of northern complicity in race...” By this account, Eric used the counter perspective provided by Dunbar to dispel myths about the Washingtons and critically engage students in questions of perspective, interpretation, and the brutality of enslavement writ large. By engaging with a newer historical work

that recasts the Washington's legacy, Eric attended to Dozono's (2022) argument that secondary sources are also important models for making sense of the past alongside making sense of the world today (p. 481). And, like others, Eric showed how history-specific disciplinary approaches related to historiography can be tactically applied for antiracist effect.

Like Eric, William also used historiography and perspective taking to push back on a traditional narrative about Lewis and Clark in ways that guided students towards more critical understandings of race and racism related to the discipline of history writ large. He asked his students, "what's the Lewis and Clark story that's been told?" explaining that

It's the Lewis and Clark story told by Lewis and Clark, and I know you've heard this phrase before, by people facing West. Those are the people who have written much of our history. Well, what about the people facing east? You know, what did the Native people think as Lewis and Clark came upon them? What would their history be? And again, the challenge there is Indigenous people traditionally are an oral people. They told stories. Their histories were kept through stories.

William went on to guide his students through an inquiry into what constitutes history, engaging in questions of whether oral or written histories are more or less valid, asking questions like "well, what about if the person who's writing the history is an idiot?" Ultimately, students concluded that both oral and written forms of

history should be equally valid and that “what's important is who's telling the story? What's the experience? What's the context?” In this example, William sought to reframe his students’ privileging of particular forms of knowledge that have historically constructed the discipline of history and in surfacing the divergences between histories written by those “facing West” versus those “facing East,” he interrogated the ‘shadow’ of historical racial and colonial violence embedded in disciplinary knowledge’s production and preservation” (Dozono, 2022, p. 471).

In their own ways, each of the teachers described above reckoned with the history discipline’s “dependence on colonial governance to create official archives around the globe implicates ‘doing history’ as simultaneously replicating colonial violence” and used critical historiography, or the undressing of the discipline itself, to shed further light on the way in which power informs whose stories are told and to what effect, implicitly and explicitly implicating the role of racism and white supremacy in facilitating that process (Dozono, 2022, p. 472). Returning to de Certeau (1984), the discipline of history itself might be considered the power laden entity in its relationship with more critical interpretations. In this case, the teachers tactically drew upon the disciplinary history’s own practices to act upon and upend the discipline itself. Crucially, teachers have a huge amount of determining power in the sources they draw upon, the stories they tell, and the way they position historical actors. Thus, their understandings of race and racism, and expanse of historical knowledge, and their particular commitments matter a great deal when it comes to the perspectives that they know to and do draw upon. In the next section, I point to places

where disciplinary practices present a double-edged sword whereby the practices on their own fall short in enacting an antiracist agenda.

When disciplinarity is not enough

While the teachers described in this chapter demonstrated the ways in which criticality and disciplinary historical practices can be woven together to teach about race and racism to antiracist effect, disciplinary practices alone are not a guarantee of antiracism. As Santiago & Dozono (2022) warned, “One can be inclusive and diverse and yet not engage in an analysis of power and liberation” (p. 177). And, while they believe it is impossible to engage historical inquiry without dealing with power dynamics, it is possible to “whitewash those power dynamics” (Santiago & Dozono, 2022, p. 184). Moreover, they caution against merely “including multiple but differing perspectives a la ‘all voices matter,’” reminding that “assimilating more voices and folding them into the center can erase these distinct forms of knowledge,” or dismember them “from the people who they come from, strip[ping] them of their context, purpose, and meaning to their respective communities” (p. 186). As noted above, the racial ideologies, historical knowledge, and overarching understanding of race/racism in society matter a great deal when it comes to the ways that teachers can and do engage disciplinary practices critically. In the space below, Elizabeth and Ursula serve as examples of when the use of primary sources, multiple perspectives, and other historical thinking skills ended up reifying problematic interpretations of racism for students.

Elizabeth, who featured heavily in Chapter 5, talked at length about sourcing,

defining her teaching practice through the use of “as many sources about history as possible,” and frequent source analysis in class. She exclaimed “the Library of Congress and National Archives are two of my best friends.” Still, her use of multiple sources and instructional practice of having students explore multiple perspectives also informed her decision to have students explore the economic benefits and downsides of enslavement, which as discussed in Chapter 5, created a permission structure for students to rationalize slavery. Rather than engaging in a historical thinking exercise of multiple sources as a form of evading external criticism amidst the anti-“CRT” rhetoric in her state, Elizabeth did so despite worrying that her lesson broke her state’s anti-CRT laws in its showcasing of the good parts of slavery. In this case, her privileging of multiple perspectives and source analysis were utilized to detrimental effect, likely harming students of color in her classroom, and operationalized as a defense of white supremacy.

In another example, Ursula, who taught predominantly students of color in a conservative area of a liberal Southwestern city, described an incident where a parent of a Black student complained about an assignment where students examined “runaway indentured servant ads in the Virginia Gazette,” exploring questions of why the indentured servants ran away and why their leasers would want them back. For the final assessment, students created their own “wanted posters” where they explored various historical sources to input information like “what the person looked like and how they were able to read and write and the diseases they had...” The parent complained that the assignment was insensitive for her child, to which Ursula

responded, “We’ve looked at primary sources and documents of indentured servants...some were voluntary, some were involuntary. And if you think we do this for runaway slaves, I said, that is not the case.” When the parent requested an alternative assignment, Ursula wondered if it had anything to do with a “slavery kind of perspective,” marveling,

Wow, it has nothing to do with the race factor at all. And I just didn’t know if that’s how her son presented it to her as we were doing something on runaway slaves, and I told her, I said, I think that would be inappropriate. I wouldn’t do that assignment.

In this example, Ursula drew a sharp distinction between indentured servitude and the enslavement of Black peoples, which is at once historically false, racially illiterate, and insensitive. As Fields & Fields (2014) reminded us, “The assignment of black Americans to slavery did not follow automatically from their color or ancestry. Rather, it occurred as part of a historical process in which the enslavement of Africans made possible the freedom of Europeans, and then cast a long shadow over subsequent history” (p. 111). To ignore the relationship between indentured servants and eventually enslaved peoples is to ignore the history that proffered additional rights onto those who became “white” at the expense of those who became “Black.” Ursula’s failure to connect those phenomena indicates a profound misunderstanding of history that cannot be solved by simply examining multiple sources and perspectives. Moreover, her inability to understand where the parent of the Black

student was coming from, along with her framing it as playing “the race factor,” again admits a lack of sensitivity to the racialized experiences of her students of color that points to larger misunderstandings about the form and function of racism more broadly. As Dozono (2022) asserted, teachers who dismiss the “traumatic relationships various communities of color have to history” end up reproducing “a certain disciplinary violence that actively cloaks racial injustices today and their legacies in the past.” (p. 468). Likewise, Doharty’s (2018) study documented the racial microaggressions experienced by Black students in the UK when learning about Black history. In response to this study, Busey et al., (2022) reminded, “Whereas most researchers are inclined to believe that socially just and antiracist classroom efforts vis à vis Black history might help students deal with race, Doharty’s CRT analysis indicates that if the curricular and pedagogical structures are not carefully aligned to support teachers in working towards antiracist educational aims, then Black youth can bear the brunt of experiencing classroom racism” (p. 18). Thus, in her inability to co-locate her student’s racialized experiences studying indentured servitude, Ursula ended up inflicting violence on her student.

The cases of Elizabeth and Ursula illustrate the importance of individuals as the determining force in whether and how disciplinary practices are applied. In each of the sections above, the teachers’ historical understandings and racial ideologies were instrumental in shaping the ways that they invoked primary sources and historical questions. In both cases, there was both a historical and lived disregard for students of color and the ways that they might have experienced the historical content of their

classrooms. In both cases, the teachers' lack of respect came through and ultimately used disciplinary practices in harmful, racist ways.

Discussion/ Synthesis

This chapter highlights potential models of discipline-specific antiracism for teachers under fire across the nation, demonstrating strategies that can elide public comment, covered by the repute of disciplinary-specific historical thinking practices and inquiry. These examples of history-specific disciplinary antiracism included the reliance on primary sources as key interlocutors particularly when exploring perspectives that were outside of teacher white racial identities or when taking on topics that could be perceived as controversial by critics; the use of student choice and voice which created distance between teachers and content and the privileging of "skills" was used as defense against parental pushback; locally specific racial reckonings whereby teachers brought the place-based history to the fore for students, forcing them to confront racial terror in their communities and schools even when teachers resisted antiracist labels; and critical historiography where teachers relied on a variety of techniques to offer counter perspectives, raise up minoritized historical interpretations, and call out the western epistemic roots of disciplinary history. These pedagogical applications were not always directly implemented as result of anti "CRT" threats or as explicitly tactical; in many cases, they were used simply because they were in line with teachers' values, teaching commitments, and understandings of what constituted best practices for teaching history. Still, these practices often worked towards antiracist ends, in many different contexts, school types, student populations,

and occurred even when teachers viewed themselves as under surveillance by varying facets of anti "CRT " apparatus.

This chapter also demonstrates the limits of disciplinary practices as inherently antiracist in history specific contexts. First, this research affirms the importance of teachers as mediators of disciplinary practices. Teachers' racial ideologies, broad commitments to antiracism, and historical knowledge were all deployed in concert in the pedagogical activities described in this chapter. Assuredly, other teachers, who lack the requisite historical knowledge, systemic understandings, and critical commitments will use disciplinary practices in ways that reaffirm the field as it is, protecting status quo epistemologies, and protecting white social studies (Chandler & Brandscombe, 2015), as was indicated by Elizabeth and Ursula.

Additionally, it is also important to note that not all historical thinking practices were equally drawn upon by teachers. While teachers described relying on primary sources and emphasized the need for multiple perspectives, they did not discuss similarly leaning on other disciplinary practices like contextualization, agency, and/or historical empathy to the same extent. It is worth considering why this was. Perhaps teachers did not view these practices as sufficiently tactical, fearing that they might incite additional criticism, or that certain practices, such as agency attribution or empathy cultivation, required more pointed criticism or commentary from teachers regarding the ways in which traditional narratives position historical actors. Or, perhaps they found that primary sources and multiple perspectives simply provided more distance and political palatability or could be interpreted as innocuous to critical

parties and thus easily defended. It is also possible that those practices were actually part of teachers' practices, they just came up less in interviews either because of the ways questions were asked and/or interpreted. Regardless, thinking about which practices were seen as more easily defensible by teachers is important to consider further.

Additionally, the aforementioned pedagogies facilitated students learning about social issues and the history of racism in the United States, these did not necessitate structural change or larger organizing efforts that pushed back against the right-wing hegemonic formations (Pham & Philip, 2021). These pedagogies also, at times, raised questions about the effects of evasion rather than taking on racism head on. As discussed above in the section on student choice, in some cases, deferring to student choice as a defense strategy ended up legitimizing parental complaints in the first place, rather than affirming teachers' commitments to critical, social justice oriented social studies. Still, these pedagogical applications do not necessarily foreclose on political action either. In fact, in cases like Arthur, Zeke, and others, one could argue that critical disciplinarity paved the way for students to become more knowledgeable about issues facing their communities and become active agents for social change. This chapter also raises questions about the use of "cover" and whether criticality should have to operate covertly, hidden in the shadows. While of course, we hope that social studies futures are not under dire threat from right wing opposition, these practices provide practical guidelines for how teachers can maintain a critical agenda even in hostile spaces. In addition to direct application by teachers, this broad swath

of examples of history-specific disciplinary antiracism can serve as fodder for teacher educators, particularly those responsible for the training of future history and social studies teachers. Considering Santiago & Dozono's (2022) call for the bridging of the disciplinary and critical camps of history education, these practices provide concrete and practical instructional practices, orientations, and tools for tactically traversing those divides.

Chapter 8: Discussion & Conclusion

In the previous four chapters, I shared findings related to how teachers narrated race and related concepts and their navigation of the sociopolitical turmoil engendered by the anti- “CRT” movement nationwide. In this chapter, I revisit this dissertation’s key research questions and further explore the main takeaways from reported findings. I ruminate on tensions and questions raised by the research, discuss implications for teachers and teacher educators, and put forth suggestions to further push the field of history education towards critical disciplinary practices, drawing on scholarship from Black feminist historians and social theorists.

To return to the central research questions of this study, findings revealed that the bulk of teachers narrated race as a social construction rather than a bio-racial fact and many taught about the constructed-ness of race with their students. This finding provides helpful insights into an area which scholarship on teaching about race has taken for granted— while a great deal has looked at teachers’ approaches to teaching about racism, what teachers know and teach about what race actually *is* has, to this point, been understudied, as has an emphasis on the CRT tenet of race as a social construction (Busey et al., 2022). Still, not all teachers had clear narrative through-lines explaining race curricularly. For example, Stuart and Arthur’s explanations of race were bounded by their school and community contexts. And in contrast to the majority of teachers featured in study, Ursula, Maureen, and Cathy presented explanations that were at times bio-racial, ahistorically expansive, or colorblind.

Interestingly, limited explanations of the nature of race did not necessarily preclude teachers from teaching about systemic racism. For example, Caden provided a simplistic distinction between race and ethnicity which seemed to have little bearing on his overarching antiracist project which included facilitating a study group on whiteness and initiating a new ethnic studies course cross-enrolled with the local college. In fact, 80% of the teachers in the study described teaching racism systemically, providing historical and contemporary examples that were at times locally situated, and/or involving a variety of racialized groups. These teachers included content that explored a multitude of manifestations of systemic racism including redlining, gerrymandering and exclusive voting practices, healthcare, and investigating local sites of racial terror and dispossession. By contrast, only 21% of teachers leaned on individualistic interpretations of racism and/or protected white feelings when doing so, a finding that is more accurately represented by prior literature (Wills, 2001; 2019). And in certain cases, like Ronald and Elizabeth, teachers' racial ideologies were deployed in confused, piecemeal, and often conflicting ways. Aside from the outliers, these findings suggest that this particular group of award-winning teachers are mostly teaching about race from a constructed perspective and also teaching racism as systematically enacted in various forms.

This dissertation also explored questions regarding how sociopolitical contexts shaped teachers' abilities to teach about race/racism. Findings revealed that teachers in non-comprehensive public-school contexts and public-school teachers who taught in diverse communities or with predominantly students of color tended to report

experiencing more autonomy and/or protection against anti- “CRT” rhetoric and attacks compared to their public-school peers. Those most affected by the right-wing, anti- “CRT” apparatus tended to teach in predominantly white, conservative communities and/or in states that had passed official restrictions, where districts had hired lawyers or where motivated school boards pursued “CRT” wherever they could find it. In the most constrained of contexts, teachers felt surveilled, pursued, and at-risk of recrimination.

At the same time, even in restrictive contexts, this research brought to light the ways in which teachers resisted these antagonisms in powerful ways that enabled them to continue teaching about race and racism, critique the ensuing suppression, and maintain fidelity to critical historical methods. Hall’s theorizing of ideology articulation highlighted teachers’ creative insubordination (Gutiérrez, 2015; 2016) whereby they drew upon strategies that included silence; outright denial of teaching “CRT” (even when they knew they were adhering to many of its tenets); transparency; and through directed attention to forced suppressions which had the countering effect of highlighting for students the absurdity of the censorship around topics related to race/racism.

This research also illustrated teachers’ reliance on history/social studies-specific disciplinary practices to shield themselves from retribution and work in service of antiracist teaching goals. In these cases, teachers used primary sources as interlocutors that provided evidence of the reality of racism and enabled them to introduce content that would otherwise be considered off-limits based on their

sociopolitical context. Some teachers used student choice and inquiry as a buffer against parents' scrutiny and drew students' attention to local sites of racial terror and systemic racism to have them more thoroughly grapple with the ways that history shapes the present. Other teachers focused on historiography in order to center marginalized perspectives, question the ways in which history itself is crafted and whose voices it leaves out, and covertly include critical content in their otherwise neutral seeming social studies curriculum. These strategies served as powerful bridges between the disciplinary and critical camps of history/social studies which Jay (2022) and Santiago & Dozono (2022) have called attention to— showing the ways that teaching history/social studies can indeed be operationalized to transformative and critical ends.

This dissertation also described places where disciplinary practices were insufficient in furthering a racial justice project. For example, both Ursula and Elizabeth described centering multiple perspectives and primary sources in their teaching. Yet, in each case, they wielded these materials to racist effect: Elizabeth's use of multiple perspectives translated to having students ponder and represent the positive elements of slavery based on economics. Ursula's use of primary sources about indentured servitude drew ahistorical distinction between indentured servants and enslaved Black people, as if the relationship was not connected and co-dependent (Fields & Fields, 2014) and ended up alienating one of her Black students. In both these cases, disciplinary practices were not enough to correct the historical record and instead wound up reifying White Social Studies (Chandler & Branscombe, 2015).

Emergent Tensions & Questions

In this section, I reckon with the tensions that emerged in writing this dissertation, grappling with whether understanding and teaching about race as a social construction is sufficient in illuminating the workings of race; whether piecemeal and/or conflicting diversity initiatives in history and social studies classrooms ultimately protect or disrupt white supremacy; and whether the symbolic efforts of history education can be considered effective in advancing antiracism more broadly. While I mostly do not purport to have solutions to these complex questions, I do offer a perspective and put forth additional questions for further exploration.

Is race as a social construction sufficient?

While understanding and teaching about race as a social construction and racism as systemic are important steps forward in puncturing a view of race as naturally occurring and/or legitimate, along with an understanding of racism as simplistic and/or individualistic, Fields & Fields (2014) pushed back on the notion that understanding race as a social construction is sufficient in undoing race's mythological power, a point amplified by Professor Jonathan Rosa who reminded us of the "profound fiction of race and its scandalous power," (Tweet, 2 January 2023) a fact which is often lost in research and discussion about race and racism in social studies. Magubane (2022) also critiqued the social construction frame, asserting that it acts as a "spell for the purification of race" (p. 2). From this standpoint, understanding race as a social construction inoculates it from further incisions, enabling racial categories to persist despite the knowledge that they were created with

capitalistic, white supremacist aims. As Fields & Fields (2014) put it, “Identifying race as a social construction does nothing to solidify the intellectual group on which it totters” (p. 100). The point here is that the social constructed-ness of race alone does not necessarily destabilize it as an organizing structure in society.

Elaborating on this point, Fields (2001) argued that “every such proposed self-definition [via racial category] is an acquiescence in (or, as the tedious jargon has it, construction of) race is that the equation of self-definition and race for Afro-Americans—and for them alone—is an axiom, no more in need of proof than susceptible of it.” (p. 50). This stance confirms Hughey’s (2012) work on the pervasiveness of hegemonic whiteness in both antiracist and white supremacist activist spheres which reified white identities as something fixed, ascertainable, and to be either emulated or dislodged. A belief in the realness of racial categories speaks to a central question of white abolitionists who seek to obliterate whiteness altogether (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). Still, beyond destroying whiteness and therefore white supremacy, what might the abolition of race altogether mean for the people-doms that have emerged out of racial categories in doing so (e.g., Blackness) and formed positive associations with their in-group radicalized identities (Golash-Boza, 2016)? Is there a way to both puncture the realness of racial categories as determinative of social hierarchies while keeping the community and cultural attachments (at least for non-white people) intact?

While many of the teachers in this study grasped the historical elements that played into the construction race and the maintenance of a white supremacist social

hierarchy, their view of race's underlying fictitiousness was not necessarily obvious, and I am unsure how/whether it would come through in their teaching. And would they want it to? For teachers like Leo and Ariella who taught in diverse and/or all-Black contexts, does puncturing the power of race even make sense for students whose racialized experiences determine so much of their lives? Importantly, this is equally true for students raced as white though the terms of which are opaquer and more hidden.

What would it look like to center excavations of race while also acknowledging the harm enacted by relying on essentialized categorizations? The fact is that the teachers in this study, I—the researcher, and society writ large all subscribe to these racial identifiers as axiomatic in a variety of ways— from identifying students demographically to asking teachers how they identify racially, to noting how students of different races might react to particular content. Relying on racial identifications is difficult to avoid especially because so much of social science relies on these categories to illuminate unequal relationships. Moreover, in a world where racism is ingrained institutionally, interpersonally, and internally, to ignore its terrorizing reach is akin to burying one's head in the sand. Still, as Leonardo (2013) reasoned, we must move through race to get post-race.

Fields & Fields also provide a way forward in their procession past “the assumption that race is a social construction, not only giving “a nuanced analysis of who did the construction but also explain[ing] *why* and *how*” (Magubane, 2022, p. 2). Indeed, some of the teachers in this study did take seriously the constraints of racial

essentialization and were thinking hard about how to further inclusive historical spaces that also did not constrain the individuality of their students or pigeon-hole historical narratives as merely stories of episodic oppression. Francesca, for example, sought to provide counter-narratives of Black entrepreneurs to put forth narratives of Black success and affluence. Polly centered inquiries into women-led slave resistances as pushing back against the dominant narrative that enslaved peoples did not resist captivity, and Carla was always on the hunt for new primary sources that countered dominant narratives of people of color, especially Indigenous peoples.

There are also concerns that focusing on ideology examination, particularly racial ideologies, risks training our eyes away from class struggle, racial capitalism, and the ways in which economics informs different actors' subject positions, policy stances, and interests/investments in white supremacy. Seeing only the dynamics of racial animus shields us from analyzing events like Jim Crow "rationally," and dealing with them "historically" (Fields & Fields, 2014, p. 119). Within this line of argument, racial categories writ large are the root of racism and must be dealt with accordingly.

The historical materialist stance taken by Fields & Fields (2014), which applies a Marxian economic interpretation to understanding social hierarchies, provides yet another disciplinary lens through which teachers and students can continue to challenge the discreteness of racial categories writ large. Attaching the construction of race and racial axioms to the ongoing and ever-changing requirements of capitalism offers additional examples showing how unequal relationships to labor, surplus extraction, and ownership can be altered, corrected, etc. This lens has the

potential for yielding alternative avenues for breaking ties to racialization, putting forth new pathways towards an antiracist, justice-based agenda that reaches beyond surface level, discourse obsessed universality that antiracist movements have been accused of, particularly in the wake of the 2020 racial reckoning. While liberals easily agree that “Black Lives Matter,” much less action has been taken to enact social policies that equally value the lives of Black people while alive.

Strategic or Appeasement?

The discordances between discursive and policy aligned antiracism surface another central tension that emerged from this dissertation project: are piecemeal diversity initiatives or efforts at a more inclusive curriculum wielded strategically based on the teachers’ perceptions of their community/states’ tolerance level substantial enough to shift the needle towards justice? Or do they merely protect white racial knowledge suitable to the white gaze? As I raised in chapter five, Ronald’s interview was peppered with anti-Black messages and in many ways his version of diverse curriculum centered the needs of his white community. While these limitations cannot be ignored, I also wondered about the other aspects of his pedagogy, especially his interest and commitment to incorporating global perspectives into his predominantly white classroom and the impact that may have had on raising his students’ consciousness of worlds outside of their small-town context.

Similarly, Stuart queried with what to do and teach about whiteness, noting the potential explosiveness of discussing white privilege with his predominantly white,

elite, private school student body. He reasoned that framing himself as antiracist was less inflammatory and potentially more effective than explicitly taking on white privilege, which raises the question— is it an obfuscation or a strategic benefit to not dig into whiteness depending on your context?

In both these examples, teachers made deliberate decisions about the best tack to take when teaching about race and racism. I do, however, think there are tangible differences between Ronald and Stuart's approaches, though on the surface they both expressed needing to cater to white comfort. Ronald's efforts at diversity enhanced students' understanding of kids around the world and helped them build connections across national differences which at times disrupted their own stereotypes (as was the case when talking with wealthy students from Mexico City). At the same time, among other factors, Ronald's contention that he had already successfully diversified his curriculum enough to meet the needs of his white students; his essentialization of racial groups; and his seemingly ahistorical analysis of racial hierarchies; coupled with his latent discursive anti-Blackness and his choices about content and coverage (e.g., 3 weeks on Rome) ended up diminishing the positive benefits of his work. Ultimately Ronald's choices about inclusion fit within his perceptions of what his white, Christian community could tolerate along with his own comfort level. Though I cannot know for sure because this research does not take up students' reception of teachers' ideologies and/or pedagogic implementation, it seems to me that Ronald's disruptive work of multiculturalism was limited to inviting students to appreciate different cultures— a surface level version of traditional multiculturalism (Banks,

1999), suggestive of the continued protection of white supremacist culture rather than its disruption.

By contrast, Stuart was aware of the ways he would be received by his student body should he bring up white privilege and/or whiteness in his curriculum. He thus leaned on history to make in-roads with his students about the workings of systemic racism without alienating the white student consistency. He discussed local examples of inequality that included defining terms like environmental racism and having students reflect on the unequal schooling opportunities that existed between themselves and their public-school counterparts. In these ways, Stuart did not shy away from critical content about racism. At the same time, despite these efforts, he reported his students of color suffering because of the hegemonic white school culture. Stuart reasoned that he was better able to serve all his students, especially his students of color, by not alienating the white ones, and to do so, he opted for historical expressions which he saw as less inflammatory. For him, this choice seemed the most expedient and effective based on his knowledge of the community, and while it did cater to the white majority— at least in regard to their feelings of indictment regarding their own racial identities— in his eyes, the historical exposition of systemic racism had more antiracist benefit than racial identity work on its face.

These examples beg larger questions of whether it is necessary to strategically deploy critical curricular content given one's external constraints. I arrive at the conclusion that yes, in many cases, it is better to strategically invoke diversity and criticality than to not. Even Ronald's students were likely better off having global

interaction than the alternative, though they most likely were impacted by Ronald's white racial knowledge (Leonardo, 2008) which seemed to propagate a sense of "otherness" when it came to race. Moreover, it seems to me that antiracist pedagogy is likely best suited to local specificity rather than universally envisioned and implemented. The teachers in this study, though often motivated by similar goals and commitments and drawing upon common disciplinary practices, were also situated in their sociopolitical contexts, understanding, and negotiating the nuances of their communities, students, etc. and most of them made best suited to determine what antiracist teaching can and should look like.

That said, compromising one's principles is not always necessary and as illustrated by many of the teachers in this dissertation, there are myriad ways to skirt official policy and local dissent. Leonardo and Manning's (2015) work on the white zone of proximal development (ZPD) helps frame the risks of compromising too much to meet the demands of whiteness, arguing that failing to confront racial structures for the sake of white "zones of comfort" "curtails natural development" (p. 10) and reifies white attitudes, preferences, and behaviors as common sense that are "then internalized in the process of socio-genetic development and shape identity formation" (p. 6). For a few teachers in the study (Ronald, Maureen, Cathy), what happened in their classrooms ultimately came back to their own racial ideologies, the preeminence of their white racial knowledge, and its intersections with historical content knowledge. Ronald and Maureen seemed to have generational attachments to whiteness expressed through a hostility to Black Lives Matter (in the case of

Maureen), and latent anti-Blackness which manifested in deficit views of Black people (in the case of Ronald). For teachers like Cathy, “not seeing race,” and an attitude of loving all students equally, underlaid with a spirit of paternalism for her Black students, made sense given her coming of age in the rural South but it did not seem to similarly impinge on her willingness to engage difficult topics related to racism. In each of these cases, teachers’ white racial knowledge was deployed differently, likely with quite varied effects regarding the pushing of white students’ racial ZPDs.

Leonardo and Manning (2015) also reminded us of the affordances of understanding the form and function of the white ZPD and set forth a model for future teachers through an anti-racist ZPD, one that some teachers in this study had already adopted or were attempting to adapt in their contexts, explaining:

at their best, anti-racist teachers problematize the structures of white power and offer what Engstrom calls a ‘given new’ activity. The students then create new forms of social activity when working through the double binds of whiteness...It is not the teachers’ role to introduce or invent tools for the changing social structure, but to nurture a space of possibility wherein youth can unlearn their investments in whiteness...(p. 12).

According to Leonardo and Manning, white teachers must shepherd themselves and their students through unlearning white common sense which “did not tell them how race actually worked but rather *how it worked for them*” (2015, p. 13) They

further distinguished between anti-racist ZPD and promoting racial diversity, which they argued is often more palatable for white teachers, asserting that the anti-racism is a “much more discomfiting proposition, requiring “that whites travel much longer distances between their actual development and learning,” testing the “limits of white comfort zones to arrive at the racial binds in their current development” (p. 13).

Teachers like Carla, Francesca, Kevin, Polly, Ariella, Delia, and Caden seemed to exemplify this anti-racist ZPD stance and were attempting to enable the process of undoing white common sense with their students. Each also seemed to be engaging deeply with their racial positioning as applied to their work with students, realizing “their political vocation as educators within a racist social context that dehumanizes both whites and people of color, with the additional burden of oppression for the latter” (Leonardo & Manning, 2015, p. 13). Others were enacting antiracist projects broadly though this did not always coalesce with actively pushing against a white ZPD.

What constitutes antiracism in the social studies?

Finally, in the wake of the “racial reckoning” of 2020, as antiracist discourse has become increasingly ubiquitous, adopted by the corporate world and many other spheres of public life, this dissertation raises questions about how these ideas have been taken up, and more specifically for this project, how antiracist ideas have been understood by teachers and applied in classrooms. Many teachers in the study, even those who did not describe their teaching practices as antiracist, had read the popular antiracist texts of the day including DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* and

Kendi's *How to be Antiracist* and described the ways that those texts had shaped or changed their thinking. Some, like Vernon and Frank, described being impacted by these texts in meaningful ways, changing how they understood systemic racism, and altering their teaching practices accordingly. Others wrestled with the meaning of these texts and implications for their practice and for society more broadly. Susan, for example, resisted an identity as an antiracist teacher, instead asserting that she was "just trying to teach history in an even-keeled way" and "bring along as many students as possible." Frank expressed a similar distaste for the term "antiracist." And Peter also struggled with the strict binary of antiracist v. racist frame articulated by Kendi (2020), which he saw as discouraging intersectional analysis and locating determinants of social hierarchies besides race. He saw this binary thinking as "crude," describing it as an "ideological distortion" that discouraged critical thinking and instead made adults "scared to death of being called racist."

In terms of classroom practice, most teachers in the study articulated a view of antiracism as limited to the goings-on of their classrooms. They described incorporating multiple perspectives, especially those representative of minoritized groups in pursuit of a more inclusive history tellings. Many also emphasized the importance of historical agency in the renditions of history that they put forth. Another large emphasis in teachers' descriptions of antiracism had to do with safety—creating spaces for students to talk about their lives, their racialized identities and experiences with racism, and creating signals for students that let them know they were welcome in their history classrooms (rainbow flags, signs on the wall, rainbow

pins, etc.). These teachers also mentioned vigilance around microaggressions and shutting down derogatory language when used in their classrooms.

Fewer described expanding their antiracist activities outside of the classroom. Polly, for example, discussed the racist recruitment practices for her charter school and her efforts to recruit a more diverse student body; Carla and Leo talked about inequitable discipline policies; Carla, Ariella and others described being extremely active in their unions; and a few were participants or leads on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion teams at their school. The most common description of antiracism had to do with teachers' own increased self-reflection and learning around issues related to race and racism.

The attention on the symbolic power of storytelling and learning of course makes sense— these are history teachers! And yet, I also wondered about the limits of the diversity, equity, inclusion approach to history teaching that tends to begin and end within classroom walls and focuses mainly on the symbolic rather than material shifts. Is storytelling enough? Much has been written about the ways in which antiracist discourse has been re-articulated by elites in ways that inoculate from the most socially transformative expressions of antiracist ideals. As Melamed (2011) has argued, these types of surface-level stabs at diversity end up reifying the liberal project and subsumes more race-radical transformations. If history teaching is indeed a racial project, in what ways do reduced renditions of antiracist principles re-inscribe a focus on identitarian politics, which tend to focus on racial identities and the need for diversity, at the expense of a structural analysis and in place of creating material

shifts in protecting the lives of non-white racialized peoples?

Implications for Teachers and Teacher Educators

This dissertation puts forth important directions for teachers and teacher educators to consider. To begin, most social justice-oriented programs are insufficient in excavating the historical aspects of race/racialization in the US. Studies have revealed the ways in which teacher preparation programs frequently lack structural analyses of racial inequity (Hayes & Fasching-Varner, 2015) and act as purveyors of whiteness (Sleeter, 1993; Philip & Benin, 2014), characterized by their exclusion of ‘voices, epistemologies, and perspectives of communities of color’ (Kohli, Névarez, Arteaga, 2018). Programs that do expand racial literacies generally focus on serving and preparing people of color (which is also of critical importance) (Kohli et al. 2018); in providing a more diverse curriculum which, while necessary to counter Eurocentrism, does not necessarily serve white future teachers in the ways that are demanded; or through a limited range of coursework available pertaining to concepts like “social justice,” “diversity,” and/or “inclusion” which are frequently siloed from content area instruction (Hawkman, 2020). White teachers continue to lack critical awareness of racial injustice in education (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). The stakes for this work are high, risking producing too few teachers who know how to support their minoritized students (Sleeter, 2016), with little hope of disrupting the racial status quo. As an overarching frame, it seems clear that both teachers and teacher educators need to have a coherent and historically grounded understanding of race and its role creating and defending racism, along with interpretations that stretch beyond identity

and towards the structural. What would it mean for the thinking put forth in Fields & Fields' (2014) *Racecraft* to become more hegemonic, popular, and operationalized? What types of new racial justice projects might these understandings enable?

Of additional consideration for future teachers and teacher educators are questions of fear in the face of imposed constraint stemming from public right-wing attacks on “CRT” and related concepts (e.g., “divisive concepts” laws and anti-LGBTQ actions). More specifically, who is actually at risk from these laws? And, who *gets* to be scared in the face of this type of antagonism necessitating changes to their curriculum? Who does not have that privilege? In an extended quote, Carla expressed her fears about the potential damage accompanying the anti- “CRT” movements, asserting that while she, as a white, award-winning teacher, does not fear retribution, she was attuned to the injuries and potential damage facing less privileged teachers, and as consequence, to students. She worried,

Knowing that so many new teachers are white. And if they're coming from education experiences where they were predominantly around white people, they're not prepared to talk about race anyways, and if they're scared now, they're definitely not going to [talk about race]. And so, you're left with the teachers that care very deeply about it and are going to fight the fight regardless. And then BIPOC teachers who fall into that first category but are also especially vulnerable to attacks...through the lens of these laws, that's not a very safe working place for them. And then you have students who are not going to see themselves in the curriculum and have no reason to relate...My

fear with those laws is we're going to lose BIPOC teachers first and foremost and then students are going to lose these kind of liberating experiences in the classroom that maybe they would have had if not for those laws.

This point speaks to a larger issue regarding the role and required actions of white teachers, in this study, and more broadly. Studies have demonstrated the ways in which white teachers can be anti-racist allies for students of color, working in solidarity towards justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Jupp, 2013) and indeed, some of the teachers in this study did demonstrate that level of critical allegiance to serving students of color, disrupting white supremacy, and using education as a vehicle for social transformation. In some cases, these excellent teachers did so under highly constrained contexts.

Still, as noted above, the teachers in this study are among the most protected when it comes to their race, their status, and their experience level. Because of this, teacher educators, district level administrations, and other educational workers need to consider what is required to produce white teachers who are co-conspirators (Jana, 2021), what and who their actions actually protect or leave vulnerable, and how they are going to defend most teachers whose career statuses are much more precarious. What stances will educators in positions of power take to shield teachers, especially teachers of color, against censorship, against community pressure, and in the face of blatant white supremacy? Finally, while compromising and subverting white supremacists temporarily might be immediately expedient, what work does that do in service of the larger project of racial justice? These are questions that educational

professionals across positions and contexts must consider.

A Path Forward: Taking History-Specific Disciplinary Antiracism Even Further

As demonstrated by the teachers in this study, primary sources are a critical component of most history curricula in the United States and proffer a level of protection for teachers, serving as interlocutors allowing them to broach content that may otherwise be deemed divisive or controversial. As I outlined in chapter seven, teachers wielded disciplinary practices to antiracist effect in a variety of ways. Still, we also know that the available sources are not always able to adequately represent the experiences of those who have been marginalized in the historical record.

Harkening to Jay's (2022) finding regarding the division between disciplinary and critical camps of social studies education research in teacher education, coupled with Santiago & Dozono's (2022) push for the field to bridge the gaps between critical and disciplinary approaches in order to ensure that history teaching is indeed a critical project, this dissertation research has shown how expert teachers operationalized history/social studies disciplinary-specific methods and content in service of antiracist pedagogy and to thwart anti-"CRT" antagonism (see chapter seven). Still, in many ways, even the most progressive teachers in this study were limited in their teaching of history— either by content restrictions or the limitations imposed by traditional interpretations of social studies that rest on certain historical narratives as determined by information available via archive, among other concerns (Rodriguez & Swalwell, 2021).

One of the problems with how history education is currently taught is that content

and curriculum tend to rely on narratives informed by and limited by available historical archives. Part of this has to do with the field of history's reliance on the written word as informing considerations of what counts as "evidence." A pronounced example of this has to do with entrenched narratives of slavery which tend to emphasize the experiences and perspectives of enslavers and recumbent parties who were more likely to record their experiences in writing. Enslaved life made literacy nearly impossible (Fuentes, 2016, p. 2) which, as consequence, has severely limited historical understandings of enslaved peoples, especially Black women, commodifying them as economic quantities related to markets and trade relations while failing to account for their quotidian lives— invisibilizing their daily acts of resistance and survivance, along with the violence that has rendered them archivally invisible or peripheral. As Hartman (2008) asked, how can you tell a story of lives throughout history that "are visible only in the moment of their disappearance?" (p.12). She considered what it might look like to tell an American story grounded in an understanding of a "history of an unrecoverable past...of what might have been or could have been...written with and against the archive" (Hartman, 2008, p. 12). Luckily, historians are already engaged in critical archival readings, making the "micro historical and quotidian" "center stage, implicating homes, bedrooms, hospitals and workshops, biases and bodies as sites of ongoing struggles to define black humanity" (Johnson, 2020, p. 12-13). These disciplinary practices can serve as models to be translated into K-12 history/social studies education, potentially disrupting ingrained patterns of societal understandings and making more room

beyond the realm of what is currently imaginable, at least by typical social studies teachers. In this final section of this chapter, I put forth a few more disciplinary-specific strategies surfaced and utilized by Black feminist historians and thinkers which I believe can further anti-racist historical practices, surface new stories and fundamentally change the ways that history is taught and understood.

Challenging Western Epistemologies of Truth & The Need for Imagination

History teachers must also call for an “accountable historical practice that challenges the known and unknowable, particularly when attending to the lives of Black women and girls” and “by bringing material together in careful and creative ways, snippets of Black women’s lives begin to unfold” (Johnson, 2021, p. 5). Taking up this idea, Fuentes (2016) and others also talk about “stretching” archival documents to account for cases where any semblance of representation is missing from written records and call for more “elasticity” in order to reveal the full range of influence that marginalized individuals have had on the world. This idea of elasticity raises the need to interrogate the western epistemologies upon which the discipline of history sits. Akomolafe (2023) wrote about the limits of history when it comes to Black peoples, raising questions about the role that ‘truth’ can accommodate explaining that “Black exile” and “Black refusal,” necessitate practices beyond what ‘truth’ can accommodate:

Something about Black exile, about Black refusal, gestures at a generosity stranger than ‘truth’ can accommodate; it gestures at how things spill away

from neat lines and steady identities; it gestures at the drunken, creolized promiscuity of ‘reality itself’. Black exile distrusts straight lines and loves zigzagging cartographies, meandering stories that do not care much for some Cartesian notion of a fixed truth. Black exile loves death and ghosts, moonlit dalliances, subterranean experiments, hybrid bodies, bacchanal aesthetics, perverse mixtures and spillages, monsters with phallic horns sprouting from their heads, grandmother concoctions, and stories of a promiscuous ‘world’ that won’t stay still long enough for us to paint its portrait. For Black exile, facts vibrate at the speed of mystery. (Akomalafe, 2023)

According to Akomalafe, because the archives have so frequently rendered Black life “a graveyard” (Hartman in Okeowo, 2020), it is critical to move beyond notions of “true” or “whether they fit into a cold notion of history.” Instead, his point is that they do not, and they cannot. Instead, “these stories allow the slaves to become something else. They refuse full disclosure. They permit them the right to opacity. They grant them a fugitive afterlife that falls outside the text of legibility. The stories mispronounce history so that other effects and orientations might be glimpsed” (Akomalafe, 2023).

Along these lines, Saidiya Hartman’s oeuvre provides important examples for how imagination can be wielded to bridge the gaps between the limitations of history and the life that it has heretofore invisibilized. For example, in *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman (2006) told a story of a young, enslaved girl who was brutally murdered which ended up igniting a national debate in Britain about ending the slave trade. The

girl was referred to in the archives only as Venus. In "*Venus in Two Acts*," Hartman (2008) returned to the story of Venus, seizing on one archival detail—a sailor testifying to the presence of another girl who seemed like a friend (Okeowo, 2020), grappling with her desire to write new narrative, "a romance that exceeded the fictions of history" that likely would fall below the standards of disciplinary history, wondering whether it is better to leave Venus and her friend "as I found them" (Hartman, 2008, p. 10) Her rationale: "there is not one extant autobiographical narratives of a female captive who survived the Middle Passage" (p. 3). In the process of reimagining "what might have been," and "what else is there to know?" (p. 2) Hartman asked,

How does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value, the invoices that claimed them as property, and the banal chronicles that stripped them of human features?... How does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom? (p. 3).

Because there are histories and historical actors whom we can never know directly about, imaginative processes are necessary to imbue humanity into those rendered not present, Hartman emphasized the need to "paint a full picture of the lives of the captives as possible," (Hartman, 2008, p. 11) while also exhuming the

lives that are hidden underneath accounts of excessive violence of slavery: “The dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us” (p. 6).

In service of this laboring, Hartman drew on *critical fabulation*, a practice that plays with and rearranges the basic elements of the story, drawing upon contested points of view as an attempt to “jeopardize the status of the event,” subverting the “authorized account,” imagining “what might have been said or what might have been done,” all as a means to throw “what happened when” into crisis. She wields imagination to do this, identifying the possible resistances that might have taken place listening “for the mutters and oaths and cries of commodity,” all as means to highlight the contested-ness of history itself, “loop[ing] the strands of incommensurate accounts...weav[ing] present, past, and future in retelling the girls’ story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present” (p. 11-12).

For Hartman, the goal is not to “give voice to the slave” but rather to

Imagine what cannot be verified... to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only at the moment of their disappearance. It is an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said... It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive (2008, p. 11).

In her invocation of the present when reimagining what happened to Venus, Hartman challenged what it has heretofore meant to “think historically about matters still

contested in the presence and about life eradicated by the intellectual disciplines” (p. 9-10). Thus, scholars like Hartman, Fuentes, Akomolafe, and Johnson push the discipline of history towards an accounting for the unaccountable and to reckon with what it would take to “imagine a free state or tell an impossible story” (Hartman, 2008, p. 10). As Akomolafe (2022) put it, “one must disguise oneself, take on new forms, and travel with mispronunciation and misrecognition if one is to exit the plantation.”

Null Values & Reading Against the Bias Grain

To challenge Western epistemologies and enact alternative historical interpretations, scholars have argued for teaching about archival silences should be a curricular goal for teachers. One way to do this, Johnson (2020) suggested, is to assign a “null value” to archival silences, suggesting that instead of merely accepting empirical silences at face value, assigning a null value to those silences can imbue “absence with disruption and possibility” (p. 135). In other words, “instead of accepting documentation that along with describing women of African descent as wicked and criminal had also often ignored them completely,” the null value... “brackets missing information and inapplicable information... marking this space of indeterminacy” (p. 135). In addition, assigning null values to the raw numbers and/or economic accounting of enslaved peoples also “surfaces slaveowners and officials as responsible for missing and unacknowledged black life in the archive, but it resists equating the missing or inapplicable information with black death (Johnson, 2022, p. 135).

Beyond highlighting archival silences, Fuentes (2016) described “reading against the bias grain,” a technique used by critical scholars since the 1980s that examines archival documents for traces and fragments of those typically excluded from official records, exploring how those who were dominant understood and represented the subaltern in documentation. Indeed, each chapter of her book, *Dispossessed Lives* explores women emergent in the fragments of the British Caribbean archives she explored, challenging the colonial authorities’ objectification of enslaved peoples as merely “Negro” or “Slave.” She described purposely subverting the “overdetermining power of colonial discourses” by “changing the perspective of the document’s author to that of an enslaved subject, questioning the archives’ veracity, shifting to the “enslaved viewpoint” (Fuentes, 2016, p. 4-5). Beyond merely rescuing individuals from historical obscurity, Fuentes’ works also takes on the historiographical context— making “plain the manner in which the violence systems and structures of white supremacy produced devastating images of what can be known about them” (p. 5). Through subverting and illuminating biases in archival accounts (p. 5), Fuentes’ work seeks to challenge typical assumptions of “the slave experience.”

Agency

Finally, demonstrated by some of the worries put forth by teachers in this study and drawing upon work of scholars like LaGarrett King (2020), teachers must teach about Black histories and experiences beyond their relationships with oppressive forces. Teaching about Black people as only in relation to enslavement and the civil rights movement ends up reifying stereotypical understandings of historical actors

that are uncomplicated, ahistorical and/or objectifying. Fuentes (2016) problematizes the category of agency altogether, arguing that the way it is usually understood—as an issue of free will— must be re-conceptualized to deal with experiences that do not necessarily map onto the experiences of the enslaved, for whom varying degrees of freedom meant different things. What would it look like to have students wrestle with the forces that differently constrain historical actors' agency? What would it look like to study the degrees of freedom that existed both before and after the Emancipation Proclamation? Or, to examine the presence and absence of freedom more broadly, rather than a taken for granted, static understanding enjoyed by everyone equally with a few bumps in the road (Walcott, 2021).

History teachers are not historians, nor are they archivists. Still, they do teach disciplinary practices and programs like *Reading Like a Historian* which centers historical thinking practices, disciplinary literacy, and lessons about historiography (Wineburg et al., 2013). Thus, history teaching holds great possibilities for pushing the needle in terms of what can be known about lives most marginalized in the bulk of historical materials. Because of this, it is the responsibility of teacher educators, curriculum designers, and other history education professionals to translate the important and already occurring work of historians into materials that can be accessible for K-12 teachers and their students. To enact a program grounded in the work of critical historians and thinkers, teacher educators need ways to access the work and practices of working historians in order to locate to new content, engage in imaginative thinking, and further hone disciplinary thinking practices to account for

the ways in which the discipline, as it is currently conceived, perpetuate limited frames for understanding Black life, and histories on the boundaries more broadly. With that tool set, they can then help prepare teachers to do this critical archival work. This means that teacher educators also need interdisciplinary support so that they can adequately prepare their teacher candidates to do this important work, and that historians perhaps can be empowered to do more translation of their academic projects into digestible, K-12 materials and writings that can push towards more expansive views of history, and more technical, precise, and imaginative disciplinary practices to enable that a liberatory history education. Importantly, this dissertation research demonstrated the ways that disciplinary practices provided a bulwark that protected teachers' abilities to teach critical content around race/racism. Perhaps then, these practices can similarly protect teachers while also offering students more expansive and transformative history learning that stretches beyond what is currently imaginable within narrower framings of "history."

Bounding this Study and Directions for Future Research

It is important to consider the affordances and constraints of this dissertation study. First, the context of the pandemic meant that the study design had to diverge from my original idea of conducting in-person observations with a smaller sample of teachers and instead I pivoted to a mixed-methods design reaching a broader swath of U.S. teachers. The fact that all interviews were conducted remotely enabled me to learn about sociopolitical contexts that would have otherwise been excluded from my sample, providing insights into rural, urban, suburban, small town, and island

communities that compose the United States and its territories, surfacing a variety of experiences and the complexities of the dynamic interplay between State and local actors, caregivers, and students, set amidst a variety of manifestations of the legacy of enslavement and coloniality. Still, in no way is this sample of teachers representative of the broader base of teachers in the United States. The teachers in this study were all white (or considered themselves to be white in addition to other racial/ethnic identifiers), had vast amounts of experience, were already keyed into professional development networks, and most importantly, had been selected by their local and state bodies as representative of excellence in teaching social studies. In all these areas, this sample of teachers were extraordinary in terms of the amount of privilege and professional capital that they held in their work as teachers. And yet, the geographic diversity of participants alone allowed me to glean insights into the varied experiences of teachers operating at the upper echelons of the field, comparing the various conditions and responses across teachers.

The downside of this type of study design is that in employing surveys and interviews, the study's data is entirely reliant on teachers' self-reporting. This study cannot "prove" that what teachers said was "true," nor ensure that what they described was an accurate rendition of what they actually do in their classrooms or the external challenges that they faced. Additionally, because I did not observe any classrooms or talk to students, this research provides no clarity on how the work of teachers is taken up by students nor does it attempt to quantify the impact of teachers' work more broadly in the larger ecosystem of anti- "CRT" activities. While it would

be valuable to triangulate the findings in this dissertation with observations of their teaching in practice, this dissertation was interested in racial ideologies and thus focused on how teachers characterized what they do with regards to race as the unit of study, rather than pinning down what they actually do.

This dissertation study puts forth an important direction for future research, particularly regarding the complex dialogic interplay between teachers and students in meaning-making around history/social studies content around race and related responses. More specifically, in future research I would like to explore what racial ideologies look like in practice, in the actual teaching of history and how teachers' racial ideologies inform students' comprehensive racial learning (Winkler, 2012). What imprints do teachers have on students' thinking when it comes to race? And, how would seeing the dialogic interaction between classrooms, students, schools, and communities in their larger sociopolitical contexts surface new understandings about the ways that race/racism is taught by teachers and understood by students? I am also interested in further exploring the tension that I put forth earlier in this chapter, specifically the ways that antiracist history education is transmuted into other racial justice projects. These are large questions in the tenor of the overall ethos of this dissertation project that will push the field of social studies education in new and important ways.

Conclusion

In the weeks that I spent writing this conclusion, Keenan Anderson, a Black history teacher in Los Angeles and cousin of Black Lives Matter movement founder

Patrisse Cullors, was tased to death by police after flagging them down for help following a car accident. Tortuguita, an Indigenous nonbinary environmental activist defending the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta from the construction of “Cop City”— a \$90 million dollar police compound on a former plantation and current forest (cite), was shot to death by police. And Tyre Nichols was beaten to death by 5 police at a routine traffic stop in Memphis. These are just a few examples of the ways in which Black and Indigenous Death (Wilderson, 2020) continues to be entrenched and normalized in the myriad racist systems and institutions that structure life in the United States. These murders, coupled with the most recent developments in the battle over “CRT” as playing out in Florida, make plain the presence of what Hartman and others have termed the afterlives of slavery.

For the duration of conducting this dissertation study, history teaching has been one of the most pronounced battlegrounds for racial justice. Though this is not a new phenomenon and history has been a culture wars mainstay throughout many periods in U.S. history, its timeliness to this project cannot be discounted. In this way, this project highlights the interconnectivity of the symbolic and the material and proves my assertion of history teaching as a racial project. The racial ideologies that teachers hold and the ways these ideologies inform their teaching of history is meaningful for student learning and for the reproduction/reification of existing racial hierarchies. Whether teachers view race as biological or socially constructed or something else altogether has implications for their work with students and the ways in which they protect and promote certain fixed and naturalized understandings about

race in the histories they construct for their students. Whether teachers believe racism is endemic to the United States will inevitably shape the narratives of U.S. history they teach, which will, in turn, be interpreted and negotiated by their students in accordance with or in conflict with their pre-existing beliefs and life experiences. Whether teachers understand the long tail of enslavement and its imprint on today's world, and indeed, whether they are truly able to see the students of color in their classroom as fully human is meaningful in terms of how students will view themselves and others. Racial projects more generally, Golash-Boza (2016) explained, "give meaning to racial categories through cultural representations while also organizing our social world based on race through social structures. Cultural ideas and social structures work together in racial formation projects." Thus, the ways in which the symbolic (or what people know and learn about race) have material consequences for the ways that society is structured.

I hope that this dissertation can inspire deeper and more coherent race frameworks to be drawn upon in teacher education and employed by teachers and social science researchers more broadly. I envision racecraft, and inquiries into the emergence of modern notions of race as co-occurrent with capitalism, coloniality, and white supremacy to be core knowledges that must be included in any significant social foundations instructional content that student teachers receive. Fields & Fields' (2014) work along with so many other scholars provides rich fodder for student teachers to ponder, as does asking students to personally engage with Zeus Leonardo's question: "What has race made me that I no longer consent too?"

(Lecture, June 2021). Questions like these create space for students of all races and identities to consider the institutional imposition of categorical markers and envision alternate realities where the inequality justified by racism no longer exists.

Additionally, social science itself is rife with bioracial understandings of race, especially in studies seeking to understand inequality and racism. A commitment to distinct racial groups to conduct these types of inquiries into racism and inequality makes sense, and yet, as Fields & Fields (2014) and others (see Deadric Williams, Twitter), have pointed out, this type of essentialized groupings even in research motivated by an interest in eliminating racism ends up preserving racial categories writ large. The tension between understanding and fixing racial inequality while also seeking to dismantle race itself presents a thorny issue where the long-term and short-term goals are in opposition. I do not profess to have answers to this conundrum, but I do think social scientists should examine their own attachments to distinct racial groups and a view of race as real in their research and question what work that does in protecting the status quo.

This dissertation has shown that a privileged sampling of teachers— those who have won awards for their work— are in many ways deeply engaged in questions about their responsibilities and commitments via teaching history. Some viewed history as an inherently political endeavor, inseparable from larger justice movements. These teachers connected to the larger contexts of school inequality with their role and practices as teachers and engaged multiple spheres of antiracist activism outside of teaching. Many others viewed history teaching as not necessarily squarely

attached to criticality. These teachers, while often teaching about systemic racism and/or the constructed-ness of race, articulated a fidelity to the discipline of history while also claiming to be neutral or unwilling to “go there” in terms of fully embracing antiracist elements.

This latter segment of teachers highlights the lines that teachers walk when navigating contextual constraints imposed by their communities and raises questions about how meaningful strategic reforms can be in the absence of more radical or substantive ideological and material shifts and the ways in which antiracist strategy can also work in service of white appeasement. This thread speaks to the common roots that race and the discipline of history share. As Wynter (1994) explained, “both the issue of ‘race’ and its classificatory logic...lies in the founding premise, on which our present order of knowledge or *episteme* (Foucault, 1973) and its rigorously elaborated disciplinary paradigms, are based (p. 3). Of course, the idea of a neutral history education itself is a myth and state mandated curriculum and corporate created textbooks convey their own ideological standpoints, generally suitable and re-enforcing of hegemonic norms (Apple, 2004). So, why does the argument that history teachers maintain distance when it comes to political disclosure (Geller, 2020) continue to be central to so many teachers’ explanations of their role and purpose as history teachers? Still in both cases of vocally antiracist teachers and those who consider themselves to be simply doing their job as history teachers by teaching students to think for themselves by grappling with sources and evidence, the shared disciplinary activities fulfill a mutually beneficial purpose of centering pursuits of the

truth, providing a critical bulwark against fascistic encroachment seeking to erase Black history and discussions of race, sexuality, gender, and really anything considered counter-hegemonic,

While I acknowledge the truth of Wynter’s argument, I conclude this dissertation still attached to a version of teaching history/social studies that is inherently critical. I believe that truth-telling— acknowledging institutional silences, bringing in new voices, and building in space to imagine lives that we can never know for sure— can serve to paint more complex understandings of the past and present, and expand definitions of human to include Black life, so frequently depicted as non-human (Wynter, 1994). These discursive changes can have effects on the ways in which social structures operate. As Stovall and Annamma (2021) articulated, “historical accuracy has become an existential threat to white supremacy.”

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Appendix A: Online Survey

- Yes, I consent to participate in this study.
- No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

2 What courses do you teach? (Check all that apply)

- Medieval History
- World History
- Ethnic Studies
- Ancient History
- US History
- Other _____

What type of courses do you teach? (Check all that apply)

- Middle School
- High School General Education
- High School Honors
- AP
- Tracked
- Untracked
- Other _____

How many years have you been teaching?

- 1-3
- 4-7
- 8-14
- 15+

What region do you live in?

- West (CO, WY, MT, ID, WA, OR, UT, NV, CA, AK, HI)
- Southwest (TX, OK, NM, AZ)
- Southeast (WV, VA, KY, TN, NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, AR, LA, FL)
- Mid-West (OH, IN, MI, IL, MO, WI, MN, IA, KS, NE, SD, ND)
- North-East (ME, MA, RI, CT, NH, VT, NY, PA, NJ, DE, MD)
- Department of Defense Schools, US Territories, and Other

Describe your school's community context

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural
- Small Town
- Other _____

Describe your school type

- Charter
- Public
- Private
- Other

What are the student demographics at your school?

- Predominantly white
- Predominantly non-white
- Ethnically diverse
- Other

How do you describe your racial identity? _____

I identify as a

- Person of color
- White person

To what degree do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I avoid talking about race and racism in my course curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to not to see the race of my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe history teachers should stay neutral on topics related to race and racism.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to promote racial harmony in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Race and/or	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

racism is a central component of my course curriculum.

I teach my students that race is primarily about skin color in my course curriculum.

I teach my students that race is a social construction in my course curriculum.

I teach my students about the history of white supremacy in my course curriculum.

Teaching about race and racism is an important part of antiracist education.

I consider myself to be an antiracist educator

These issues are complex and best understood in conversation. Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

Yes, my email is _____

No

Is there anything else you'd like to share or ask?

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a story about why you decided to become a history teacher? What do you feel are your most important responsibilities as a history teacher?
2. How might you explain race to your students in terms of its history (where it comes from) and the role it plays in society?
3. How do you teach about what race is?
4. Where does race/racism come up in your curriculum?
5. What are some of the historical events involving race that you teach?
6. Can you walk me through the details of how you teach a historical event related to race/racism/whiteness in particular?
7. How are you navigating the current political climate regarding the attacks on CRT and teaching about race and racism? Are you affected? If so, how? How are you responding?
8. How did you teach about the January 6th events on Capitol Hill? What were your considerations for that decision?
9. What overarching messages do you think students walk away from your class with regarding the world, the country, etc.?
10. Do you consider yourself to be an antiracist educator? Why or why not?
11. Describe to me what antiracism looks like in teaching.
 - i. a. Probe how they're defining antiracism ("so, for you, antiracism is _____")
12. Describe the demographics of your neighborhood where you spent most of your years before college.
13. When did you first learn about race yourself? Tell me a story about when you first realized you were white?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to add?