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### Author

Campbell-Cunefare, Tiffany

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

*I feel like an AP student that doesn't belong:*

Nontraditional Students of Color Discuss Academic Identity, Positionality, and Support in the  
Figured World of AP United States History

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare

Committee in Charge:

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Laurie Stowell, Chair  
Professor Manuel Vargas

University of California San Diego

Professor Amanda Datnow

2020

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Chair

University of California San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2020

## DEDICATION

To my daughter:

Defined and undefined by

Your Blackness, your Whiteness

Your boldness, your insecurity

Your brilliance, your naiveté

May your education never impede your learning.

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## VITA

1996 Bachelors of Art, English Education, University of New Orleans

1996 – 2002 Teacher, Muirlands Middle School and La Jolla High School,  
San Diego Unified School District, San Diego, CA

2002 – 2004 Teacher, Murrieta Valley High School and Vista Murrieta High School,  
Murrieta Valley Unified School District, Murrieta, CA

2003 Masters of Science, Educational Administration, National University

2004 – 2006 Literacy Specialist, A.J. Briesemeister Middle School, Seguin  
Independent School District, Seguin, TX

2006 – 2012 Assistant Principal, San Marcos High School, San Marcos Unified  
School District, San Marcos, CA

2012 – 2014 Principal, San Marcos Middle School, San Marcos Unified School  
District, San Marcos, CA

2014 – 2017 Principal, San Marcos High School, San Marcos Unified School  
District, San Marcos, CA

2017 – 2019 Director of Secondary Education, San Marcos Unified School District,  
San Marcos, CA

2019 – present Assistant Superintendent (Equity & Secondary Schools), San Marcos  
Unified School District, San Marcos, CA

2020 Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, University of California  
San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

I feel like an AP student that doesn't belong:

Nontraditional Students of Color Discuss Academic Identity, Positionality, and Support in the  
Figured World of AP United States History

by

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2020  
California State University, San Marcos, 2020

Professor Laurie Stowell, Chair

The research supporting the importance of high school programming in the entrance and persistence of students into higher education is dense and varied with several studies directly noting the importance of College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) courses specifically in the college admissions process. With typically smaller class sizes, more experienced teachers, and students with stronger academic backgrounds, those taking AP courses benefit from a perceived and actual AP advantage in both high school and subsequent higher education endeavors. Traditionally, however, there has been a significant gap within the make-up of students who enroll and succeed in AP courses. Despite the recognition of the import of AP coursework to future academic effort and dedicated efforts by educational and government entities to increase the number of students entering the AP program, Black and Latinx students remain significantly less likely to enroll in AP classes, take fewer associated national AP exams, and score lower on said exams than their White and Asian peers. A problem connected to students of color, the various issues associated with race and ethnicity have been identified as primary influences in the academic achievement gaps between Black and Latinx students and their White peers.

Much research exists to support the reasons why students of color are failing to enroll in AP courses at the same rate as their White and Asian peers; less so, however, exists that discusses these students' experiences while enrolled in AP class, thus limiting our understanding of the elements that interact to hinder their engagement and achievement in class and in the subsequent national AP exam. Using a theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory and Figured Worlds from Holland et al, this study presents the cases of five Latinx and Afro-Latinx students navigating the particularly complex world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH). The research focused on how their experiences shaped their

academic identity, how they were positioned and positioned themselves within the class as a result of their academic identity, and how their interactions with their teacher, their traditional and nontraditional peers, and the curriculum influenced their engagement and achievement within the class.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Beginning as a niche program for the academically elite, the College Board's Advanced Placement program has become institutionalized into our educational landscape, serving over 2.8 million students and administering nearly 5.1 million AP exams in the 2018/2019 academic school year alone (The College Board, 2019). Nearly seventy years since its inception, it is for many the gold standard of rigorous coursework for high school students. With savvy students loading their schedules with multiple AP courses to improve GPAs and "pad" their academic resumes, the message, it seems, in many of our schools, is that the way to college is through Advanced Placement. The notion, while certainly a broad generalization, does hold some truth when reviewing the educational decisions students must make to maximize their chances for college acceptance. There is a sizeable amount of research indicating that a complement of rigorous courses taken throughout high school is critical factor in college preparation and enrollment (Ndura, Robinson & Ochs, 2003; Swanson, 2008; Long, Conger & Iatarola, 2012). The AP Program, specifically, has shown a positive correlation between passing its corresponding exams and college enrollment, persistence, and first year college GPAs (Wyatt, Patterson & De Giacomo, 2015). Moreover, there is research to show that AP courses positively influence college admission decisions (Santoli, 2002; Geiser & Santelices, 2004; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). Many colleges add extra weight to the AP course grade in calculating the GPA, and consider the number and exam scores of applicants, with some colleges even penalizing students for not taking an AP course when it is available to them (Lawrence, 1996, Attewell, 2001; Hebel, 1999; Rigol, 2003; Hacsı, 2004; Sadler & Tai, 2007).

There are also indications that the general characteristics of AP classes benefit students enrolled and are linked with positive academic outcomes during high school. These courses tend to be taught by more experienced teachers, have fewer students, have fewer discipline issues, and have students with stronger academic backgrounds (Farkas & Duffett, 2009; Sadler, 2010). Some point out that simply sitting in the class – with or without taking the associated AP exam – benefits students, and it has been suggested that AP programs can even be used to help close the ubiquitous achievement gap (Burriss & Wellner, 2005; Taliaferro & Decuir-Gunby, 2008). Better teachers, better classroom environments, better college admissions and retention opportunities, even the possibility of better college GPAs all point to a perceived and real AP advantage for students taking part in the program (Shaw, Marini & Mattern, 2013).

Looking at educational opportunity through a critical lens, the AP advantage is simply one more leverage from which privileged students – namely affluent White and Asian students – have the opportunity to profit. Perhaps not surprisingly, the yin to the AP advantage yang, is an equally powerful AP gap that exists between students of privilege and their Black and Latinx peers. Despite the enormous growth of the AP program, largely due to efforts by education and government entities to open AP access to traditionally underrepresented students, Black and Latinx students remain significantly less likely to be enrolled in an AP course (College Board, 2002; Johnson & Kritonis, 2006; Klopfenstein, 2004; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004) and when they do enroll, they are less likely to take the accompanying exam or score as well as White or Asian students (College Board, 2014). Some may be tempted to explain away this phenomenon with a lack of preparation or motivation on the part of Black and Latinx students, however, even among high achieving

students with equal AP preparation, these students remain disproportionately underrepresented within the program. The consequences are far reaching, for the unbalanced distribution of the AP advantage contributes to an academic achievement gap that ultimately feeds the social and economic inequities from which our society suffers.

Much research has been done on the importance of opening access to the AP program and affording all students the opportunity to benefit from its advantages. I became particularly interested, though, to hear the voice of students within the AP access narrative. Where do Black and Latinx students place themselves within this AP culture that adult educators are so fervently pushing them to enter? An understanding of the perspectives of nontraditional students of color within the AP class will offer valuable insight to teachers, educational leaders, and larger educational and governmental entities on the actions that serve as buoy or barrier to these students' connection to and learning within the class.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2014, the Pew Research Center verified what educators have espoused for decades – education is vital. They found that “on virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment...young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education.” (Pew Research Center, 2014). This statistic gives witness to the role that education has and continues to play in the perceived and actual success of individuals in American society. Our founding fathers connected the education of our youth to the advancement and prosperity of the country (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2000), making it one of the most important social programs of the government and central to the ideology of the American Dream (Hochschild, 1996). Despite the 1954 denunciation of ‘separate but equal’

by the Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, the 1964 Civil Rights Act by Congress, and Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, there remains a gap in the educational achievement and subsequent employment and income attainment of students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

The sad fact is that on both academic and behavioral indicators and predictors of post-high school success, Black and Latinx students do not perform at the same level as their White and Asian privileged peers (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006; Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, Kewal-Ramani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016). The importance of achievement in high school cannot be overstated, as it is performance at this level that can both open and close the door to post-secondary aspirations and accomplishments. Studies by Clifford Adelman in 1999 and 2006, for example, found that of the students who enrolled in college, the courses students take in high school were more predictive of college success than family income and race. The academic choices that students make – or that are made for them – play a significant role on their future choices. For Black and Latinx students, in particular, their educational path can be the difference between poverty and prosperity, prison and peace of mind.

**History of Advanced Placement.** The reasons why Black and Latinx students are not enrolling or performing in rigorous courses at the same level as their privileged peers cannot be boiled down to one factor; indeed it is a knotty interplay of the external – institutionalized educational and societal beliefs and actions related to race, privilege, and expectation – and the internal – identity, self-belief, and positionality – that influence where students are placed in the educational landscape (Ndura, Robinson & Ochs, 2003; Rodriguez, 2001, Norman,



Ault, Bentz, & Meskimen, 2001). For the AP program, in particular, clues may lie in the history of the program itself.

From its inception, the Advanced Placement (AP) program has been a place for elite, highly capable students. At its heart, it was developed to offer challenge and opportunity to “the most ambitious boys and girls...in high status schools” (School and College Study, 1952), with the second director of AP stating that “the basic philosophy of the Advanced Placement Program is simply that all students are not created equal” (Dudley, 1958). As a result of this, in its early days, only a small number of elite schools participated in the AP program and only the highest achieving students were invited to participate. One of the most influential and longest lasting results to come from the program’s early commitment to exclusivity was its high-status curricular brand (Schneider, 2009). As early as the 1960’s, however, proponents of equitable educational environments began to take note that AP students were primarily White students from affluent backgrounds (Campbell & Bunnell, 1963). While College Board made efforts to expand the program and increase minority enrollment, in the late 80s the typical AP student remained White and was more likely to come from homes where the parents were highly educated and in prominent occupations (Rothschild, 1999). The 90s and the early 2000s saw explosive growth of the AP program in schools throughout the U.S. – 532 test takers in 1954 had expanded to more than 1.1 million by 2004 (Berger, 2006). Part of that growth could be attributed to a commitment to diversifying the program; an equity policy statement from the College Board (2002) and monetary incentives provided by the federal and state governments to initiate or expand AP courses helped to fuel an increase in the enrollment of low income and/or minority students. Still, in a 2013 report to the nation entitled *Finding America’s Missing AP and IB Students*, The Education Trust found more

than half a million low-income students and students of color were “missing” from the AP program, with White, Asian, and middle- and high-income students being twice as likely to participate in these programs than Black and Latinx students.

Despite its original mission of offering opportunity to the most ambitious boys and girls, it is noteworthy that in 2011 only 20% of Black and 30% of Latinx students with demonstrated potential to pass an AP exam (as determined by PSAT scores) attempted to do so. This compared to 38% of their White and 58% of their Asian peers (College Board, 2012). In its *10th Annual Report to the Nation*, College Board (2014) acknowledged this gap in their “Right to Rigor” statement:

All students who are academically ready for the rigor of AP —no matter their location, background, or socioeconomic status —have the right to fulfill that potential. Last year, however, hundreds of thousands of prepared students in this country either did not take a course in an available AP subject for which they had the potential to succeed or attended a school that did not offer a course in the subject (p. 28).

But even when students are enrolled and take the exam, there remains a gap in achievement. A review of the class of 2018 AP exam takers scoring a 3 or more shows 64% of White students achieving this score marker compared to 31% for Black students and 43% for Latinx students. Table I below offers details on this sobering comparison.

Table I: 2018 National AP Exam Score Distribution

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total Exams Taken</b>	<b>Average Mean Score</b>	<b>Percent Scoring 3 or Above</b>
Asian	740,825	3.31	71
Black	308,791	2.07	31
Hispanic	1,092,606	2.44	43
White	2,443,317	3.04	64

Note. Sourced from College Board (2019)

Simply put, Black and Latinx students have traditionally been denied access to the AP program and its accompanying educational advantages, a space historically reserved for the

White and privileged, in much the same way they have been denied access to privileged spaces – spaces that would allow for advantage and upward mobility – in larger American society. And as in society at large, good intentions, hope, and money have been inadequate in substantially shifting these inequities.

Researchers, in efforts to examine this phenomenon, have looked to determine what factors contribute to these groups' lack of enrollment in AP courses. Low teacher expectations, lack of parental involvement, socioeconomic status, district and school level tracking, and the selection and identification process for said courses have all been noted as possible factors (Archbal, Glutting, & Qian, 2009; Burton, Whitman, Yepes-Baraya, & Kim, 2002; College Board, 2002; Darity, Castellino, Tyson, Cobb, & McMillen, 2001; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Klopfenstein, 2004; Salinas, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003).

A few studies explore the dilemma of being a student of color and a high academic achiever from the perspective of students, with students noting identity conflicts (loss of cultural identity), lack of adult support, and lack of peer support as reasons they avoid enrollment in rigorous courses (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). Most research, however, falls to adults offering their reasoning on why the AP gap exists; there is little to be found that gives students voice and authority in explaining why they are not enrolling or performing in Advanced Placement programs at the same level as their peers.

Additionally, while the research discusses who does and who does not enroll in AP, and gives some indication of why they do (status and prestige, access to more rigorous curriculum, academic acceleration, and college preparation) and do not (low expectations,

school and district level barriers, limited parental knowledge, and lack of peer support) enroll; there is a dearth of research examining how these factors interact to influence the culture of the AP class itself and in turn, how this culture influences nontraditional AP students' perception of and performance in the course. What is it about the AP culture that discourages even academically prepared Black and Latinx students from enrolling; and for those who do enter the class, what is it about their experience that leads them to participate less and perform lower than their peers? This study looks to fill this knowledge gap and enable us to begin to understand the in-class reality of nontraditional students – those racial/ethnic groups (namely for this study Black and Latinx students) that have been absent from the AP program. It will explore how the individual elements of the classroom – the curriculum, the actions of the teacher, and the actions of traditional AP students – interact to influence their overall experience.

### **Purpose of the Study**

A walk through the hallways of the large, diverse district high schools of which I am an administrator reveals, with stunning clarity, the racial and cultural inequities that remain prevalent within the education system. With naught more than a glance into one of the segregated classrooms, one recognizes the space – dominated by White and Asian faces – where the AP advantage lives. It is an understanding not lost on our students, for be it of their own volition or from institutionalized barriers, Black and Latinx students, to a large extent, are missing from AP classrooms. Much has been said of this phenomenon, but what of those students who have chosen to enter into these privileged spaces? How do these traditional

outsiders position themselves within this academically elite culture and does the context of the course make a difference?

Using a critical race lens, I followed the journey of a small group of Black and Latinx students who chose to enter into a particularly complex AP world. AP United States History (APUSH), while consistently being among the top five courses by enrollment (The College Board, 2017), presents content that is particularly challenging for groups that have historically been mistreated and marginalized. Generally, how are these students positioned in the class, and more specifically, when racially and culturally sensitive topics arise in the curriculum, how are they placed among their peers? As educators and leaders, we can learn much from their perceptions and their voices; for while our intentions may be to open the world of AP to all students, we must also ensure that the actions of teachers and students within said classes bear out that invitation and that all students can engage and learn regardless of the course or content.

### **Research Questions**

Through the lens of critical race theory, I conducted a narrative case study to explore the experience of nontraditional students of color within an APUSH classroom. More specifically, I examined how these “outsider” students entered into what Holland et. al refer to as the *figured world* of APUSH, and how actions, interactions, and reactions in the said world influenced their positioning, including the effects of the presentation of racially and culturally sensitive curriculum.

I explored the following overarching research question and sub-questions within this study: In what ways, if any, do the perceptions of nontraditional students of color about their

identity and position within the figured world of AP United States History affect their learning and engagement with the class? To fully explore this question, the following related sub-questions were considered:

1. What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do nontraditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within the academically rigorous figured world?
2. What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement?
3. In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?

By addressing these questions, this study will begin to illuminate the conditions under which nontraditional students of color may have an improved perception of and experience in AP courses.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study used two theoretical frameworks to analyze the data: critical race theory and figured worlds. Intertwining the concepts, both frameworks were used to explore and interpret the experiences of Black and Latinx students in an AP US History class at a diverse suburban high school.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical race theory (CRT) provided one part of the study's theoretical framework and is the lens through which I viewed and interacted with the

qualitative data. CRT looks at the ways in which racial power and privilege are constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and examines racism as an ideology; it helps to acknowledge the injuries racists actions cause, and empower victims of racism to find their voice and push against institutionalized factors perpetuating their subordination (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In education it offers methods and pedagogies that guide efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominate racial positions in and out of the classroom. (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). For this study, the lens of CRT was used to analyze how the curriculum and pedagogy of the APUS History course contributed to an environment that influenced the engagement and positioning of nontraditional students of color in the AP classroom.

**Figured worlds.** Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain introduced the concept of figured worlds in 1998 as part of their larger theory on the construction of self and identity. In their seminal text *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, the researchers define figured worlds as socially and culturally constructed realms where “particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p 52). While Holland’s et al. figured world shares its DNA with Vygotsky’s social constructivism with a focus on context and situatedness, it references more explicitly the significance of positionality and history/tradition in the interactions and activity within the figured world. This can be seen in the four characteristics:

1. Figured worlds are historical phenomena into which people are recruited or enter. The worlds are continually developed through the work and interactions of those

participants, and the participants are constantly shaped by their interactions within the world.

2. Figured worlds develop as a result of social encounters among participants; as such both the position of the actors and their social interaction is important. Individuals' entree into worlds is dependent on their social position; they may be denied entrance into some, may themselves deny entry to others, and may enter and interact fully within other worlds.
3. Figured worlds are socially organized and replicated realms where participants are sorted and learn to relate to each other in different ways. Our interaction and "work" with others within the various worlds defines them and allows them to perpetuate.
4. Figured worlds are populated by recognizable social types, thus the identities that people gain within the world are "grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization of those worlds' activity" (p 41).

*Positional Identity.* Within their work with figured worlds, Holland et al. distinguish between a person's figurative identity – that related to the narratives and storylines of figurative worlds – and one's positional identity which concerns "one's position relative to socially identified others, one's sense of social place, and entitlement" (125). Positional or relationship identity refers to how one identifies one's position relative to another and influences the choices we make – be it how we speak, how we dress, how we express emotion, etc. – about our interactions with others in specific spaces (figured worlds). We "impersonate" (127) the conventional forms of activity that are prescribed to these places in order to identify with and gain positions of privilege with those whom we interact.



The concept of figured worlds, generally, and positional identities, specifically, then, along with CRT will be useful tools to examine how race, position, and power interact to influence the experience that nontraditional students of color have within the context of the AP History classroom, traditionally branded as an academically elite and privileged space.

### **Methods**

The overarching research question guiding this study is: In what ways, if any, do the perceptions of nontraditional students of color about their identity and position in the figured world of AP US History affect their engagement with and learning in the class? This examination of students' perspectives of their experiences within the bounded system of the APUSH classroom lends itself to ethnographic case study and narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). While as a general rule, case studies are not generalizable, they do allow for in-depth analysis, rich description, and often, a more detailed understanding of findings (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1999; Creswell, 2007). Narrative inquiry, too, is a way to understand and inquire into the experience of participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); it is a methodology that allows for students to have voice and authority over their telling and interpretation of their story. Because both the case study and narrative inquiry approach requires time and concentration on what and how the participants express (Creswell, 2007), I concentrated on 5 nontraditional students of color with the same teacher in multiple periods of APUSH at a single, diverse suburban high school; this limited external validity, but allowed for more extensive study of individual student voices.

Because case study design looks to multiple data sources, I used the following recommended information: documents and artifacts (in the form of required textbooks, curriculum outlines, student grading documents), semi-structured individual interviews, and student journals (Yin, 2014). I did not want to interfere with the culture of the classroom and was interested in the participants' authentic interactions with their teacher and peers, so I avoided participant observation (Cresswell & Poth, 2018) all other behavior that may have influenced normal day to day actions in the classroom.

### **Significance**

The import of rigorous coursework in a student's educational pursuits both in high school and beyond has been well documented. Equally researched and chronicled is the ever-present gap that exists between White and Asian students and their Black and Latinx peers in the enrollment within said classes. But while much has been written about this phenomenon, there is an intriguing gap in the literature related to the culture and perception of the AP class. There is much to be learned from how nontraditional students of color perceive the culture of the Advanced Placement classroom, and how this perception influences how they position themselves within. The added layer of the particular class – APUSH – and its curriculum that contains racially and culturally sensitive material offers insight into student reactions when such content is delivered. Learning what actions from the school, the teacher and peers helped or hindered their interactions during these lessons, and delving into the suggestions they have for the actions and/or dialogue of those who have traditionally held positions of power within the class serves to inform educational leaders and teachers, as well as students.

Educational leaders concerned with equitable and safe learning environments are poised to learn about the artifacts or actions that negatively influence the experience of students of color in one of the most popular AP courses offered. Teachers can gain insight into if and how particular methods of introducing and teaching racially/culturally sensitive materials are perceived as culturally sustaining or degrading by students of color. Lastly, by foregrounding race, this study allows students of color, namely, Black and Latinx students, the opportunity to express, in their own words, the racialized experience they have in a course that we have likely recruited them into.

## Key Terms

There are terms utilized in this study that may be unfamiliar or may have more than one interpretation. To offer clarity, the following key terms will be defined:

**AP Advantage:** The traditional academic benefits in high school and college that students receive.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:** An extension and alternative of culturally responsive pedagogy that calls on educators to support young people in both sustaining their cultural and linguistic competence and offering access to dominant cultural competence (Paris, 2012).

**Figured world:** A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998).

**Positionality:** In speaking of qualitative research, St. Louis (2002) conceptualizes positionality as the relational place or value one has that influences and is influenced by various context. Maher and Tetrault (1994) define positionality as “the knowers specific position in any context as defined by race, gender, class, and other socially significant dimensions” (p.22). In Holland’s et al. theory of figured worlds, positionality refers to the positions that are given to individuals in various figured worlds.

**Social and Cultural Capital:** Social and cultural assets or advantages that is seen in the form of cultural knowledge – learned, reproduced, and rewarded by and for the dominant class – that confers social status and power. Bourdieu used his theory to explain the differences in academic achievement among French school children.

**Nontraditional students of color:** Students who have traditionally had limited access to rigorous and/or high-status courses due to institutionalized racism. For the purposes of this study, nontraditional students will refer to Black and Latinx students.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The importance of AP enrollment for all students has been noted in the introduction to this study, as have the measures governmental and educational agencies have made to increase, or “open”, enrollment of Advanced Placement courses to nontraditional students of color. While the measures have increased the number of students enrolling in AP, the enrollment and performance gap between Black and Latinx students and their White and Asian peers remains (College Board, 2012; College Board, 2014). While much study has been devoted to the why’s and how’s of student enrollment in rigorous coursework, even looking specifically at AP enrollment, this study looks to explore the racialized experience of Black and Latinx students in one of the most popular AP courses. In doing so, it looks to contribute an alternate lens to the current literature regarding Advanced Placement: the voice of students, their stories, and their recommendations for an improved environment and learning experience. To set the stage for the study, this review of literature will address research related to critical race theory in the context of education; the intersection of race, ethnicity and American History pedagogy; and the concept of figurative worlds and identity development and positionality within the figured world.

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines ways in which racial power and privilege are constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and offers methods and pedagogies that guide efforts to transform the aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, pioneers of culturally relevant pedagogy, argue that race, despite often being conflated with notions of class and ethnicity, may be *the* central construct for

understanding inequity in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). We can look, for example, as far back as noted African American historian C.G. Woodson, who documented the role of schools in structuring inequality, noting that African American students, despite having equal or better mental prowess, were made to feel that their race would never measure up to the standards of the dominant White culture (Woodson, 2006).

Whereas class and gender play a role in inequities (Grant & Zweir, 2011; Fulmer, Gelfand, Kruglanski, Kim-Prieto, Diener, Pierro & Higgins, 2010), CRT argues that they alone cannot account for all of the variance in school experience and performance between White students and students of color. There is evidence to suggest that, even when holding constant for class, middle-class Black students do not achieve at the same level as their White peers (College Board, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT, then, looks to examine racism as an ideology, acknowledge the injuries racists actions cause, and empower victims of racism to find their voice and push against institutionalized factors that perpetuate their subordination (Solorzano et al., 2000). For this particular study, CRT serves as a springboard for discussions on various forms of institutional racism that Black and Latinx students must navigate as they make educational choices regarding their entrance into rigorous classes and what they may face when they enter.

**Institutional Racism.** Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within social systems that consistently disadvantage individuals of the non-dominant culture (Better, 2008). The United States has a long history of not only accepting, but sanctioning and promoting the superiority of one race over another, seen in the country's long-held privileging of White citizens in economics, politics, and education (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009). Jones (2000) contends that institutional racism is manifest in material conditions and in access to

power. In education, for example, students of color may be barred access to quality educational programming (material condition) or may have limited or edited access to information about their own history (access to power), both situations serving to perpetuate practices and beliefs that advantage the dominant White culture (Jones, 2000). Unlike personal prejudice which manifests itself in racial assaults or microaggressions perpetrated against people of color by racist individuals (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978; Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Sue & Constantine, 2007), institutional racism is often performed and perpetuated by those who openly denounce racism and fail to understand the role their privilege plays in everyday racism (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008)

**Colorblind racism.** The acknowledgement of the realities of racism is a fundamental component of critical race theory. As such the post-racial, colorblind narrative is considered a particularly insidious and damaging form of racism that allows for the perpetuation of ingrained racist policies and practices (Choi, 2008). The colorblind narrative has been described as “racism without racists,” and as such, is dramatically different from the flagrant racism seen in pre-civil rights era of the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It has been argued that it is a bid for innocence from society’s dominant group and allows for the escape of responsibility for White privilege (Gordon, 2005). This can be manifest in several ideological threads: abstract liberalism (affirmative action is unfair to White people); naturalization (segregation is natural); cultural racism (Mexicans do not put much effort into education); and minimization of race (racism is a thing of the past) (Choi, 2008). This type of racism is easy to overlook, especially by those who are not negatively affected by it. Today’s liberal post-racial ideology assumes that a good citizen is a colorblind one. The consequence



of this is that the colorblind ideology works to disguise racial privilege embedded in society, particularly in our educational institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Colorblind ideology has taken on many forms in the modern era, all having in common, however, the purposeful separation of race from other sociological constructs. Nationalistic color-blind rhetoric, for example, in which we are all Americans and assimilated into the mainstream's way of life serves to strip minority groups of their culture, creating raceless and disembodied citizens (Rosaldo, 1993). This focus on American identity and nurturing citizenship serves to overshadow race-based tensions and struggles of people of color (Choi, 2008).

Closely related to the American ideal and nationalism is the meritocratic ideology, in which one's status in life is determined by hard work; and, as such, working hard in school will inevitably lead to success. This meritocratic rhetoric leaves no place for racial discourse, effectively canceling out any role race may play in a student's lack of success (Choi, 2008). When faced with student academic failures, liberal proponents of the meritocratic ideology often point to family structures or poor neighborhoods of minority people. Critical race theorists would argue this reduces a racial problem to a problem of socioeconomic status; strengthening the meritocratic reasoning that class is an attainable trait and its fruits are a reward for hard work and compliance in school (Choi, 2008). Instead, critical race theorists contend that meritocracy is difficult for students of color to realize with institutionalized policies and practices preventing them from achieving in school (Fine, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

Studies have found that minority students react negatively to the colorblind meritocratic rhetoric espoused in schools; after witnessing numerous failures of hard-working

students around, then they see fundamental flaws in the social structure of the school leading to their own academic and social disengagement within the school setting (Katz, 1999; Ogbu, 1994; MacLeod, 1987).

**Academic tracking policies.** Historically, academic tracking has been defined as the grouping of students by presumed ability or achievement into a series of courses with differentiated curriculums (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993; Oakes, 1987). Students typically are divided by high, average, and low academic performance, where students with higher academic performance are placed on higher tracks that usually lead to advanced courses and four-year colleges (Allen, Farinde, & Lewis, 2013). Traditionally, this model of school tracking has been associated with factors of race and social class rather than actual academic ability (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). This segregation between privileged and non-privileged students was found to have negative effects on students' self-concept, self-efficacy, and overall academic motivation (Ansalone & Ming, 2006). A 2013 study found students enrolled in lower tracks were 60% more likely to drop out of school; the students who comprised these tracks were mostly Hispanic, received special education accommodations, or were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Werblow, Urick, & Duesbery, 2013). CRT proponents would argue that the disparities between the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in lower track and special education courses and their underrepresentation in higher track and gifted education courses are a direct result of institutionalized racist beliefs, practices, and policies within our public school system (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1997). The colorblind meritocratic narrative perpetuated in schools and attempts at culture neutral ability grouping have served to value the experiences of some students over others (Oakes, Wells, Datnow, & Jones, 1997).

In response to growing scrutiny of the track system, course by course ability grouping has taken the place of programmatic tracking in many schools. For example, a student may take Honors English and “regular” math, allowing greater freedom of movement and purportedly greater access to different types of courses for all students. Research, however, shows that course structures remain in place that lock students into stratified course placements (Lucas, 1999), and that even in “detracked” schools, past tracking practices affect the form and content of networks that students form with their peers and educators (Hallinan & Sorenson, 1985). Consider, for example, the AP program of which this study is centered. In 2008 in its *4th annual Report to the Nation*, the College Board stated, in part, “We...believe true equity is not achieved until the demographics of AP participation and performance are identical to the demographics of the entire school” (p. 7). At that time several initiatives were in place to serve traditionally underserved students in AP including several state initiatives and the federal Advanced Placement Incentive Program. In 2007, Black students took approximately 113,000 exams with an average score of 1.91 (out of 5); Latinx students took 109,000 exams with an average of 2.48; and White students took 1.1 million exams for an average score of 2.95 (College Board, 2008). Ten years later in 2017, Black students took 307,000 exams with an average score of 2.03, Latinx students took 1 million exams with an average score of 2.39, and White students took 2.4 million exams with an average score of 3.02 (College Board, 2018). While there is a bright spot of Latinx students’ exam participation increasing ten-fold, their participation is half of White students. Black students have fared far worse, with both their exam participation and performance woefully behind their White counterparts. As can be seen, although schools and districts have made policies to replace traditional tracked classes with heterogeneous, mixed-ability classes, the practice in

schools has continued to support racial, ethnic, and social-class segregation, with low-income students and students of color generally remaining in the lowest levels classes (Lucas, 1999; Oakes, Wells, & Associates, 1996; Wheelock, 1992).

Research conducted on schools moving towards detracking have found that it is politically difficult to do because it requires educators, parents, and students to rethink traditional, pervasive beliefs about intelligence and merit as related to race and class (Wells & Oakes, 1996; Oakes et al., 1997). Higher tracked classes are often considered high status spaces for the elite. Privileged students – primarily White and Asian – that have been labeled gifted at a young age feel that these high-level classes are their destiny while minority students feel unqualified and intimidated to enter (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). Privileged parents and their students actively work to maintain the hierarchal track structures in which some students continue to receive far less; as a result, school and district policies that aim to open access to more rigorous courses of study for minority students are stunted by the practices of the individuals that operate within them. Welcome by word, but shunned by deeds, non-privileged students of color find themselves figuratively and often literally locked out of the very classes they need to access the educational opportunities and subsequent personal success that are pushed in our national meritocratic narrative.

Some reports suggest that just the attempt to detrack helps schools to become more attentive to equalizing access for all students, helps to maintain higher expectations for low-track students, and helps to improve the quality of work in classrooms (Oakes, et al., 1997; Wheelock, 1992). Additionally, teachers have been found to become more reflective in their practice, improving their overall professional effectiveness (Ross, McKeiver, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1997). With both student outcomes and teacher effectiveness on the line, intentional

recruitment and retention strategies for Black and Latinx students into rigorous courses have been proposed (Ford, Scott, Moore III, & Amos, 2013). Educational institutions must look at practices that address academic, social, and cultural barriers that exist in the classroom and beyond.

**Curriculum choices.** Culture has been defined as the sum total of artifacts created by any group in its struggle for survival and autonomy (Toure, 1969). Education has been the primary source to transmit knowledge about these artifacts and struggles. It is argued that in the American educational curriculum, the only group deemed worthy of study is of European descent, particularly White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who are epitomized as the model or ideal group (Sizemore, 1990). Proponents of traditional western curriculum argue that the West defined modern civilization and is therefore, sacrosanct; it is the basis of everything good in American culture, and should be the end goal of school curriculum (Neusner, 1989). It has been noted that in many texts, the importance of persons of European descent and their cultural contributions has been distorted and magnified to the extent that such contributions bear little resemblance to actual anthropological evidence, and at the same time, the cultural contributions of people of color have been so marginalized as to render their cultural offerings inconsequential (Sizemore, 1990).

Curriculum violence is defined as “the deliberate manipulation of academic programming in a manner that ignores or compromises the intellectual and psychological well-being of learners” (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010). This environmental microaggression – or microinvalidation – is perpetuated by school districts through practices and choices that reinforce hegemonic curriculums that suppress or omit cultural values, messages, and historical truths of minority groups. Such curriculums serve to reflect the interests of the

dominant class and to continue oppression amongst minority groups (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010). A curriculum primarily concentrated on European-American ideologies and perspectives leads to students of color attending public schools that offer little acknowledgement of their culture or histories (Brown & Davis, 2000).

Cultural memory refers to the narrative, symbols, and discourses that help to construct how individuals understand their place in history (Brown, 2011). School curriculums play a vital role in the sociocultural understandings about race and racism in the U.S. that students acquire. What students read in textbooks and other curriculum reinforces the preferred historical narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The failure of textbooks and school curriculums to adequately address the role race and racism plays in our nation propagates ideologies of color-blind racism and negatively impacts both students of color and their White peers (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Students of color find themselves having to navigate a classroom environment in which the curriculum contributes to discriminatory behavior in the classroom. Black students noted that classroom material that portrayed Blacks as being violent and aggressive reinforced beliefs of White students about their potentially volatile nature. They felt the “assumption of criminality” built into the curriculum encouraged their White peers to commit microinsults in the classroom like sitting away from them, or sitting near exits if they found themselves sitting next to a Black student (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). When school systems fail to appropriately address race and racism within their curriculums, it should not be surprising that students leave high school and enter colleges and workplaces, including teacher education programs and schools, ill-equipped to understand the structural/institutional nature of race and racism and the vital role they have both played in U.S. societal relations (Brown & Brown, 2010).

Scholars continue to call for curriculum redesign that reflects accurate portrayals of all groups, thus uplifting and transforming the educational experience for all students (Watson, 2013); however, no curriculum can teach itself. It does not matter if teachers have access to exceptional curriculum if their beliefs, unconscious or otherwise, prevent them from effectively teaching all students (Ladson-Billings, 2011).

This careful consideration of curriculum and pedagogy is particularly important in the American History classroom – the place in which the birth of a nation is on display and scrutinized. Here, perhaps more than in any other classroom, students are forced to face the values, beliefs, and practices within the country that privileged some – namely, White males – and subordinated others (Banks, 1998). It is not surprising that scholars have noted that students of color experience the history classroom differently than their White peers, showing a deeper understanding of the multiple, subjective storylines present in the historical record than their privileged peers (Banks, 2008; Epstein, 1998, 2000; Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Almarza and Fehn (1998) found that Mexican-American students felt their teacher presented only the “White” version of history, and Black students, too, echoed the sentiment of learning only a Eurocentric, “White-washed” version of history (Epstein, 2000). Teachers, though, have not recognized this disconnect between their presentation of history and their students’ perceptions (Almarza & Fehn, 1998). White teachers, it has been noted, are unaware of how their “Whiteness” shapes the assumptions they have about their students’ experiences; they are normed to Whiteness, and thus foreground a White, Eurocentric version of history that places persons of color in a subordinate and/or peripheral position within the historical record (Sleeter, 1993; Keating, 1995; Almarza & Fehn, 1998).

Proponents of CRT, generally, and culturally relevant pedagogy, specifically, call for a race-conscious teaching of history in which the traditional American origin story is critiqued (Howard, 2003; Tate, 2003). A critical teaching of history makes students aware of how the construct of race has been used to systematically oppress people of color, and through this education, grow as citizens, gaining, what Ladson-Billings (1995) terms as critical consciousness.

It is worth noting here how the developers of the College Board's AP US History curriculum respond to the teaching of history. As stated in the *AP United States History Course and Exam Description* (2017):

History is a story of the past that serves to guide the present and the future. In a personal way, it enriches one's sense of belonging to a human community that transcends both time and space.... In terms of informing the future, history offers alternative ways of addressing unique or recurring challenges, which, amongst other things, can aid in the formulation of one's own goals and commitments. For example, the study of segregation serves as a constant reminder of the dangers of discrimination....The narrative that history relates, however, is only as faithful and complete a representation of what happened in the past as the human mind can recover. Because of this incompleteness, historical analysis is prone to error and rests upon interpretation, requiring critical evaluation at every step. The disciplinary practices and reasoning skills articulated in the course framework equip students to begin to understand and create historical knowledge in a process similar to that followed by historians. This process begins with a close analysis of historical sources and reaches its conclusion when evidence, drawn from historical sources, is used effectively to support an argument about the past (p. 103).

Here College Board presents a view that acknowledges that the study of history is an interpretive endeavor, "prone to error" and "requiring critical evaluation." In doing so they recommend to teachers of APUSH, instructional strategies that encourage "exposure to a variety of diverse historical interpretations [to] build students' ability to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of historical arguments" (p.103). The suggested strategies



which include Socratic seminar, debate, and shared inquiry do indeed offer students the opportunity to think critically and deeply about topics; however, there is no mention of how to include these strategies within a classroom of racially/ethnically diverse learners. For example, shared inquiry is defined as follows:

Students actively read a provocative text, asking interpretative questions (questions for which there are no predetermined right answers) before and during reading. After reading the text, students engage with their peers to make meaning from the text, offer different answers to the questions, and debate one another, supporting their positions with specific evidence from the text (p.119).

Teachers are then given an example of how to apply the strategy:

The teacher provides a selection of primary sources, including texts from individuals involved in the Latino, American Indian, and Asian American movements, and asks students to use the content in Key Concept 8.2.II (“Responding to social conditions and the African American civil rights movement, a variety of movements emerged that focused on issues of identity, social justice, and the environment.”) to choose a specific number of these documents that they think best address Learning Objective CUL-4.0 (“Explain how different group identities, including racial, ethnic, class, and regional identities, have emerged and changed over time.”). Before completing the task, either as homework or in small groups, students explain what they think the learning objective means and the teacher clarifies any confusion. When students have chosen their documents, they form small groups based on the documents chosen. Students formulate a response to the learning objective based on their choice of documents and present their ideas.

After student presentations, the teacher addresses issues that remain to be discussed; for example, by reviewing a document that few or no students chose to analyze. The teacher then asks students how the case study of these movements compares to the African American movement for civil rights (e.g., how were the movements similar/different, what tactics were used in each movement and how were they similar or different, what were the results, what did success mean for the various movements). Student responses allow the teacher to assess how well students understand the various movements and how identities have changed over time (p. 122).

In this particular example, students engage with racially/culturally sensitive material through small group interactions and must present ideas to the class at large. The College

Board's manual fails to offer any additional comments or resources related to culturally sustaining pedagogy; thus, in this scenario, a student of color is left open to potential microaggressions or microinvalidations perpetrated by fellow students or even presented in the curriculum itself. Such instances where students of color are forced to negotiate the country's ignominious racial history abound in the APUS History course; how students navigate such events is cause for further study.

CRT serves as a fitting lens through which to analyze the ways students of color perceive and react to environmental factors (e.g. hegemonic curriculums, tracked classrooms) that are – consciously or unconsciously – rooted in historically racist structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 1998), as is attested to by the wealth of educational literature that have used aspects of CRT as a frame (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). However, CRT alone is an insufficient analysis tool for this specific study in which students choose to enroll or not enroll, and engage or not engage, in a particular high school course, namely, Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH). The realm of Advanced Placement has its own historical narrative and cast of characters who have traditionally enrolled in the program (Dudley, 1958; Schneider, 2009; Campbell & Bunnell, 1963, Rothschild, 1999). It is a “figured world” of elite academia, a world in which Black and Latinx students have, to a large extent, not been privy.

### **Figured Worlds**

In the 1993 article “Situating Learning in Communities of Practice,” Jean Lave theorized that learning is a “social phenomenon, constituted in the experienced, lived-in world” (p. 64). Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain help us to analyze that world with their concept of figured worlds that was introduced in the 1998 seminal text *Identity and*

*Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Of particular interest is their discussion of the heuristic development of identity; how identities are formed through activity and interaction. Figured worlds are the “socially produced, culturally constructed activities” (pp. 40-41) in which people participate. When new members enter into the figured world, they participate and connect with the traditional social types that populate these worlds; and through this interaction their identity evolves. Figured worlds have four characteristics:

First, they are “historical phenomena” that people are recruited or enter into (p 41). Just as identities are developed within the figured world, the figured world is developed or evolves through the participation of its inhabitants.

Second, they are social encounters situated in particular times and places; and within them, positionality matters. Holland et. al note that “some figured worlds we may never enter because of our social position or rank; some we may deny to others; some we may simply miss by contingency; some we may learn fully” (p 41).

Third, figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced. Within them people are sorted and categorized, and orient themselves to the world and each other based on their roles. The population does not interact within a stagnant world, but rather, through their evolution and work with each other, the figured world evolves and is recreated.

Fourth, figured worlds distribute people by relating them to landscapes of action; thus activities related to the worlds are populated by familiar social types and host to individual senses of self (Urrieta 2007, p. 108).

Urrieta (2007), in his synthesis of Holland et al.’s concept of identity development, summarizes:

In figured worlds people learn to recognize each other as a particular sort of actor, sometimes with strong emotional attachments, value certain outcomes over others, and recognize and attach significance to some acts and not others...In them, people “figure” how to relate to one another over time and across different time/place/space contexts (pp. 108-109).

Despite some criticism that the lack of a concise and concrete definition for figured worlds has led to inconsistent application by researchers (Urrieta, 2007), the concept has proven useful to educational scholars. It provides the opportunity to analyze social interactions through the classic social constructivist lenses of context and situatedness, while offering an additional focus on positionality and power dynamics that influence all relationships (Martorana, 2017).

Researchers have explored individual’s entrance into unfamiliar figured worlds (Salerno & Kibler, 2018; Saunders & Ash, 2013; Seglem & Garcia, 2015; Gelfuso & Dennis, 2017; Powell, 2017); identity development within specific worlds (Rubin & Land, 2017; Barron, 2014; Chang, 2014; Chang, Torrez, Ferguson, & Sagar, 2017; Pena-Talamantes, 2013; Urrieta, 2007b; Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006); and, of particular note for this study, student learning within specific figured worlds (Iannone, 2014; Boaler, 2000).

Tan and Barton (2009) explored the learning of low income, racial minority students in the figured world of a sixth grade science classroom. In this two-year ethnographic case study, the researchers noted the science teacher, through his interaction with students, his construction of the physical space, and his teaching practices, created three figured worlds to aid students in their learning of science. In this case, the teacher explicitly invited students into unfamiliar figured worlds of science, validated the identities they had already developed from their outside communities, and gave them opportunity to develop new identities-in-practice as scientists. As a result of the efforts, the teacher came to “share” responsibility of

learning with his students (p. 69), students began to recognize the value and knowledge that they brought to the science class, and, as stated by the researchers, marginal students gained “narrative and positional authority” (p. 70). Within this figured world, deliberate actions by the teacher shifted the positional identities of the participants, ultimately shifting the culture of this figured world of the 6th grade classroom.

Teaching practices also figure in Boaler and Greeno’s (2000) research on mathematics classrooms. They discuss two different AP Calculus classrooms as different figured worlds, one a traditional mathematical classroom in which students worked alone with little to no interaction with each other, described as “structured, individualized, and ritualized,” (Boaler & Greeno, 2000 p. 178) and the other, a collaborative classroom in which students were positioned as co-constructors of their learning in classroom environment that was described as “relational, communicative, and connected” (p. 178). In their findings, Boaler and Greeno (2000) indicated that the structure of the figured world and students’ positioning in it impacted how students viewed themselves as (mathematics) learners and ultimately, the learning that took place in the classroom. It was noted that students in the collaborative classroom indicated that the discussion gave them deeper insights into the math and that the culture of the mathematics classroom shifted. Similar to the shared learning responsibility in the science classroom of Tan and Barton’s (2009) research, Boaler and Greeno assert that the collaborative AP Calculus classroom they studied indicated that “in discussion-oriented figured worlds, connections between learners are emphasized as students are positioned as relational agents who are mutually committed and accountable to each other for constructing understanding in their discourse” (p. 178).

Robinson (2007) used the figured world of history learning to explore how one professor influenced the pedagogy of the primarily White, middle class students in her social studies methods class. The pre-service teachers' experiences as students in traditional history classes reflected what many students experienced in the figured world of traditional history learning – an environment in which “smartness” is equated with the following of directions and the memorization of unrelated dates and events (p. 197). By contrast, the figured world of history learning presented by the students' new professor was described in the following way:

In contrast, the figured world of history learning in Dr. Gomez's classroom did not recognize 'smartness' as memorization. Her classroom also did not privilege traditional historical narrative, generally construed as dead White men. Rather, this world recognized and privileged revisionist history—narratives containing the voices of underrepresented and marginalized groups that are often left out of history textbooks and classrooms. Significance was assigned to students' ability to 'think' and 'inquire' about revisionist narratives in relationship to traditional historical accounts, their personal lives, and their future teaching lives. Within this world, history learning was not marked through memorization and recall. Instead, history learning was marked through a nexus of personal, emotional, reflective, complex and political interrogation of history.

Through the study, Robinson found that the pre-service teachers who were engaged in the figured world of revisionist and inquiry-based history learning as presented by their professor re-figured themselves as history learners. The implications for students, asserts Robinson, is that within this figured world of revisionist, inquiry-based history learning, urban students – even those taught by White, middle class teachers – can develop identities as history learners and refigure who they are, not only in social studies classrooms, but in their schooling in general (p. 213).

In these cases, the role of teacher in the figured world is highlighted. The pedagogical choices of the teacher serve to influence how students interact and learn within the figured

world. Instructional choices ranging from the physical set-up of the room to the discourse norms prescribed by the teacher build, in part, the figured world of learning in which students participate. These choices, though, are only a part of the make-up of the figured world.

These figured worlds of learnings, as has been established, are social constructs, developed as much by the histories and identities that each actor brings to the environment, as the curriculum and instruction introduced by the teacher. These identities help to order and rank the participants within the world, and these rankings, or positions, in turn, influence the interactions between individuals in the figured world, and how individuals react to the figured world. Thus, the figured world and its culture is as much about student interaction and action, as it is about teacher action within the world.

**Positional identities.** It is through interaction with each other and the environment, and participation in activities that are presented within the figured world that individuals develop and grow their identities within the culture (Urrieta, 2007). Of note is the role that power, social status, and privilege play in the development of the roles and identities that participants take in the figured world. While the figured world constructs meaning from interaction and participation of individuals within a micro-level context, one must remember that it is situated within macro-level contexts (i.e. cultural, historical, and sociopolitical arenas); thus the characterizations and identities that are developed within the world are influenced – if not completely determined – by the practices, beliefs and norms of those larger contexts (Ryu, 2015). Identities are created and assigned by and for individuals that reflect unequal power dynamics, different social statuses, and contrasting privileges within the world (Holland et al., 1998). Individuals do not enter, if they are invited to enter at all, as equals; and this positioning affects interactions and identity development within the figured world.

Actors within the figured world have various interpretations and expectations of those who enter the worlds; and their interaction with individuals is based on these interpretations (Vågan, 2011).

Positionality, according to Holland, et al., is related to the position that is given to individuals within the figured world. Positional identities, they state, “are about acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation. Localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth, their own ‘symbolic capital’” (pp. 128-129) by which participants are ranked. The educational realm, for example, has its own culture of knowledge, language, values, and behaviors by which its participants are measured (Giroux, 2003). Based on these, students may be labeled or “positioned”, among other things, as the class clown, the overachiever, the lazy student. In Holland et al.’s, conception, individuals do not create these definitions of themselves as much as they accept, reject, or negotiate the identity that is offered to them (Urrieta, 2007).

How students are positioned and their positional identities are not clear-cut though, for, as was discussed above, they are influenced by macro level contexts beyond the classroom (Barton & Tan, 2010; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Ruben (2007), for example, notes that in the figured world of an urban high school serving low income students of color, teachers assumed, or “positioned”, students as deficient and incompetent. Their interactions with them reflected this attitude, with educators in the building focusing more on domination and social control of students rather than conceptual learning, which teachers assumed students from this community would be unable to grasp. In this case, the assumptions that educators in the school had about the community at large (the macro-level) – assumptions about race, class, and income – affected



their interpretations of and interactions with students in the classroom (micro-level). Students found themselves having to negotiate assumed identities and relative positions that were projected upon them (Ruben, 2007).

It is not, only, though, the projections of others that affect one's positioning and positional identity in the figured world. Pulling from a social constructivist view of identity development, positional identity is inherently linked to an individual's life experiences within the culturally constructed world in which they live (Moore, 2008; Moghaddam, 1999). We are treated by others based on broad social constructs – gender, race, class, ethnicity, to name a few – and this treatment translates into the experiences that shape our perspectives and influence the lens through which we view and understand the world (Davies & Harré, 1990; Maher & Tetreault, 1994). This is notable, for as Holland et al., state, “persons look at the world from the positions into which they are persistently cast” (p. 44). “There is history in the person, which significantly shapes social activity” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 189). So while individuals are positioned by others within the figured world, they also position themselves and interact with others based on their previous life experience and treatment.

Like the figured world itself, positions are fluid. They rely on historical interpretations, in the moment interactions, and future understandings; they are tied “across interactions or scales of activity” (Anderson, 2009, p. 292). Moreover, positions are not flat, singular characterizations of individuals, for one can, and most likely does have, and will be assigned multiple positions (or identities) over time (Adams, 2011). Kayi-Aydar (2014) describes it this way, “It is through the accumulations of positions that positional identities are formed and shaped. The person becomes, in a sense, a compound noun or a label that he or

she may internalize to act or not act on in the future. Positioning therefore closely interacts with who we are, thereby affecting how we behave and communicate” (p 688).

Current literature indicates that positional identities can affect when and how students interact with each other in the classroom and can influence individual student learning. Maloch (2005) and Zacher (2008) studied positional identities related to race, class, and gender of elementary aged boys during classroom literacy events. In 2002 Ritchie explored gender and positional identities during group work in science classrooms, and Clarke (2005) looked at how girls positioned boys in literature circle discussions. Miller (2007) and Kayi-Aydar (2013) considered English language learners positioning in the classroom. Benjamin (2016) used positionality to explore student silences during classroom discussion of controversial issues, noting that student participation (or silence) was influenced by the positional identities of both the teacher and the students in the class. This finding is similar to Fordham’s 1993 study chronicled by Holland et al., in which young women developed positional identities in which they silenced themselves in the figured world of their high school.

Hatt’s 2007 study of the figured world of smartness explored how poor, urban, minority youth were positioned in traditional high schools. She contended that institutionalized practices like tracking and low expectations by teachers served to unjustly marginalize poor students of color. The traditional methods of figuring smartness in schools, including grades, enrollment in honors and gifted classes, large vocabularies, high standardized test scores – methods that are historically steeped in institutional racial, ethnic, economic, and gender bias (Lightfoot, 2004; Nieto, 1996; Oakes, 1985) – serve to harm low income, minority students. They were not only placed in a lower position by the school, their

historical experiences led them to exclude themselves from the figured world of smartness, choosing instead to find higher status, or position, in the figurative world of “street smartness.” These students ultimately, withdrew from the traditional world of schooling altogether.

The above studies help to show the role that positionality and positional identity play in a student’s acceptance into and participation in a specific academic figured world. While the literature includes qualitative studies exploring identity development that include student voice, and separate studies that consider the culture of specific figured worlds in education, there is a dearth of literature that examines the choices students, particularly high school students, make in positioning themselves within an elite figurative world like Advanced Placement. An exception would be Ryu’s (2015) study of the positioning of newcomer Korean students in Advanced Placement Biology. Through interviews and observations, Ryu concluded that within the localized figurative world of AP Biology, students were stratified, with “U.S. born and raised, White, native English speaking students...ranked at the top, and their practices, knowledge, and values...viewed as legitimate” (p. 354). There was a clear power dynamic in which students were assigned a lower position by the teacher and peers, and placed themselves in a lower positional identity because of expectations and interactions within the figured world. Ryu’s study is not, purposefully so, generalizable, as its focus was “localized” (p. 350) to a particular classroom. There are, however, clear implications for science teachers presented from the study. The import of recognizing the complex negotiations that minority status students – racially, culturally, linguistically, etc. – face in classrooms, particularly elite classrooms, has implications that reach beyond the localized figured world.

## Summary

Despite decades of governmental and educational intervention to close the educational achievement gap, there is an ever present disparity in the K-12 achievement, college enrollment and subsequent degree fulfillment of students of color and their White peers. This academic disparity is then reproduced in society at large with persistent inequities in employment and wealth attainment between Black and Latinx individuals, and White persons of privilege. The importance of rigorous course-taking in high school to college enrollment and persistence has been consistently shown in years of research, with the Advanced Placement program, specifically, shown to increase students' academic trajectory. It, too, however, has its own gap, as Black and Latinx students enroll at lower rate and perform worse on the end-of-year standardized AP exams than their White counterparts. This study aims to contribute to the body of literature that explores student enrollment in Advanced Placement. While much research exists around the lack of enrollment by Black and Latinx students in AP courses and the consequences; there is less exploration of why students do not enroll, and even less on the experience that students who do choose to enter the elite world of AP have within the course.

I chose to look specifically at the Advanced Placement United States History course for two reasons: 1) it has consistently had one of the highest nationwide enrollments of all AP courses, and 2) it's racially and culturally sensitive curriculum that delves into the complicated origin story of the United States may prove particularly challenging for Black and Latinx students to navigate within the elite class setting of Advanced Placement. Using a dual framework of critical race theory and figured worlds, I looked to examine the ways race influenced these students' positioning in the localized figured world of Advanced Placement

U.S. History. The use of critical race theory allowed an in-depth exploration of intentional and/or unintentional racism – in the form of curriculum, actions, and attitudes – that students faced in the course.

The study was buoyed by the lens of the figurative world, which allowed me to study the AP U.S. History class as its own culture, a world that holds expectations of behavior specific to its constructed narrative of academic elitism and privilege. The import of the intertwining of race and power dynamics presented in figured worlds is consequential for nontraditional Black and Latinx students entering AP U.S. History. On one hand, it is a course that, because of increasing open enrollment and recruitment policies, has become accessible to them. On the other hand, they enter as outsiders, whose macro-level societal status related to their race – defined by the assignation of a lower status and exclusion from places and activities by a historically privileged and White race – influences their initial positioning within the class. This outsider status is compounded by the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in the AP program. They do not fit into the historical narrative of the figured world of Advanced Placement; they are not the AP student that traditional members of this world, including teachers and students, recognize. They enter, then, at a lower status, in a lower position. How these students developed their learner identity while negotiating their position within the figured world of APUS History was the focus of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction of Research Design**

This study is guided by a qualitative research design that allows a deep exploration into the experience of Black and Latinx students within the bounded system of an Advanced Placement United States History class (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Exploring how this particular group of participants – nontraditional students of color in Advanced Placement (AP) – navigates the culture of a class in which they hold outsider status lends itself to the design and analysis techniques that qualitative research provides. Creswell (2007) notes that we use qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to “share their stories” and “hear their voices” (p. 40) about a particular problem within a specific context or setting. In this case, how do students’ racial histories – their experiences with institutionalized and personally mediated racism that influence their own level of internalized racism (beliefs about members of their own race and their own abilities) (Jones, 2000) – affect how they enter into and interact with the artifacts, materials, actors, and established storylines of the figured world of APUSH (Holland, et al. 1998)?

The importance of story and storylines are embedded in this work; it is an invitation for nontraditional students of color to tell the story of their racialized experience in a particular setting. It is also the story of an academically elite figured world as told through the voice of neophytes to said world. Figured worlds themselves can be considered as “narrativized” or “dramatized” worlds, as Holland et al. (1998) point out: “[m]any of the elements of a world relate to one another in the form of a story or drama, a ‘standard plot’ against which narratives of unusual events are told” (p. 53). The characters (participants) within the world, the roles they play (actions and interactions), and the setting (culture) within

which they act, is defined and continually redefined (figured) by the narratives expressed in and about the world. What is the story of the figured world of APUS History and how do the various stories held within it – personal lived histories, presumed interpretations about identities (the social narratives of race, gender, etc.), even the prescribed rendition of the nation’s origin story – interweave to influence or alter the lived learning experience of Black and Latinx students? These students, and the figured world they navigate, have a story to tell, and so I looked to a narrative case study design to craft a vehicle through which they could speak.

**Narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry, with its focus on the study of people and their experiences, has proved particularly useful for educational researchers (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Moen, 2006; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 2000). Egan and McEwan (1995) note that narrative research can inform and instruct, particularly in educational research, and that it can also offer a way of knowing, and a way of organizing and communicating experience.

Narrative inquiry has multiple definitions depending on the research topic and setting (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). In simple terms, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe it as “the study of experience as story” (p. 375); yet, it holds a more complex duality in the world of research design. It has been defined as both a method of inquiry and a phenomenon (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006), a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006); through narrative, individuals can both understand the world and explain the world (Richardson, 1990). Moen (2008) goes further describing it as “a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method, and a mode for representing the research study” (p. 57); and in outlining the approach offers three

claims: 1) that human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives, 2) that the stories that are told depend on the individual's past and present experiences, her or his beliefs, the people the stories are being told to, the addressees, and when and where they are being told; and 3) that narratives are multivoiced (p. 60). These ideas work well with an analysis of student experiences within a figured world, realms that are produced and reproduced by storylines that are enacted within them and narratives that are created about them. Additionally, Moen's claim that people's stories depend on past and present experiences relates to the positional identities that students have when they enter into the figured world and will influence how they both experience and recall those experiences. My use of narrative as a choice in this study can perhaps be best summed by Webster and Mertova (2007): If narrative is fundamental to communication, then the use of narrative as a research method may, for instance, give us a better understanding of teaching, learning, and performance, in a wide range of environments and may assist in generating more appropriate teaching tools and techniques (p. 12).

Listening to and understanding the stories of these individual students within the world of APUS History can offer insight to teachers and educational leaders as they make choices both in teaching pedagogy and in recruitment practices for nontraditional, particularly Black and Latinx, students into academically elite spaces.

**Case study.** Like narrative inquiry, descriptions of case study vary within the realm of research design. Creswell (2007) states that "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system...over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 73). Yin (2009) offers that case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within



its real life context” (p. 18). A qualitative case study design is appropriate when: a) the study looks to answer “how” and “why” questions; b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of the participants in the study; c) circumstantial conditions are covered in the study because the researcher determines they are relevant to the phenomenon being studied; or d) the boundaries are not clear between the context and the phenomenon (Yin, 2008). Within this study I looked to explore “how” and “why” Black and Latinx students position themselves as they do in the particular context (the figured world) of AP US History.

Creswell (2007) acknowledges that there are several approaches to choose from when considering case study methodology. Three prominent methodologists, Yin, Stake, and Merriam offer landmark approaches that guide educational research (Yazan, 2015).

Yin espouses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to case study (Creswell, 2007) and discusses three types of qualitative case studies: explanatory (explain causal relationships), exploratory (develop a working hypothesis), and descriptive (describes a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurs) (Baxter & Jack, 2008). His work leans toward a positivistic view of research in which, as Crotty (1998) notes, objectivity, validity, and generalizability are fundamental. Quality control within the design is crucial in Yin’s case study research (Yazan, 2015), and he states, should “maximize four conditions related to design quality: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability” (Yin, 2009, p. 19).

In contrast to Yin, Stake (1995) holds a decidedly constructivist view toward his case study research, noting that “most qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (p. 99). He sees case study researchers as interpreters and gatherers of interpretations who then report their own interpretations of what they have gathered; this work

is then reinterpreted by the reader. Stake notes that “there are multiple perspectives or views of the case that need to be represented, but there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view” (Stake, 1995, p. 108). Stake uses systematic procedures to examine a case being studied, looking not necessarily for generalizability to all cases, but rather deep understanding of the specific case in question. In this type of intrinsic case study design, the case is studied for its own uniqueness (Stake, 1995; Baxter & Jack, 2008). In a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) the researcher focuses on one issue or concern, and selects a bounded case to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). Here, an in-depth scrutiny of the case helps facilitate our understanding of a larger issue or helps to refine a theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In conducting the research, Stake mentions four defining characteristics of case study research: it is holistic, in that researchers should consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its contexts; it is empirical, in that researchers base the study on their observations in the field; it is interpretive, in which researchers use their intuition and they view their research through the lens of researcher-participant interaction; and lastly, it is empathic, meaning the researchers reflect the experiences of the subjects in an emic perspective (Yazan, 2015).

Merriam (1998), like Stake, has a constructivist viewpoint of case study. In her view, “The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own” (p. 22). Her definition of the case is broader than both Yin and Stake, for her defining characteristic rests with the delimitation of the case (Yazan, 2015). She allows for the case to be a person, a program, a group, a policy, “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). As long as the

researcher can specify a phenomenon and “fence in” (Yazan, 2015, p. 139) their inquiry, they can call it a case. She defines case study research as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). Merriam makes distinctions about case study research similar to Stake, noting three specific attributes: a) it is *particularistic*, focusing on a specific, or particular, situation, event, program, or phenomenon; b) it is *descriptive*, yielding a rich, thick description of the phenomenon; c) it is *heuristic*, helping the reader understand the phenomenon under study (Yazan, 2015).

Not surprisingly, the three researchers establish differing approaches to the actual design of case study. Yin advocates a very tightly structured design that moves logically and sequentially through five components: research questions; propositions; units of analysis; logic linking data to propositions; and criteria for interpreting the findings. Yin allows for minor changes in the design once the data collection has begun; however, any major changes would require researchers to return to restart the design of the study (Yazan 2015, Yin, 2009). In contrast, Stake proposes an open and flexible design that allows researchers to make major alterations even after the research has begun (Yazan, 2015). He does call for researchers to have two or three research questions to “help structure the observation, interviews, and document review” (Stake, 1995, p. 20); however, he prescribes to Parlett and Hamilton’s (1972) notion of progressive focusing where the design unfolds as “the problem areas become progressively clarified and redefined” (cited in Stake, 1998, p. 22).

Merriam falls somewhere in the middle of Yin’s highly constructed design and Stake’s loosely formed emergent approach to design. Influenced by a traditionally qualitative outlook, she advocates for a flexible design with some structure, calling for Yin’s preferred

sequential ordering – a roadmap, if you will – while allowing for some of Stake’s in the moment ambiguity and alteration that may occur during the inquiry process (Yazan, 2015). She encourages a five-step design process: a) conducting a literature review; b) constructing a theoretical framework; c) identifying a research problem; d) crafting and sharpening research questions; and e) selecting the sample (Yazan, 2015).

In reviewing these three seminal researchers approach to case study design, I found the structure of Yin’s and Merriam’s approaches to provide the best framework for this inquiry. Stake’s open and fluid methodology, while initially appealing, leaves little architecture from which a study can be constructed (Yazan, 2015). Nevertheless, the emergent nature of narrative inquiry on which my study rests – the need for my participants to live, interpret, and recall their experiences in AP US History, and my subsequent need to interpret those stories – required the flexibility of the purely qualitative case study espoused by Merriam and Stake. Hence, Merriam’s semi-structured qualitative case study design, “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii), fit my exploration of nontraditional students of color racialized experiences in the bounded (figured) world of AP US History.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks that the ground data collection and analysis are critical race theory (CRT) and positional identities in figured worlds. CRT foregrounds race in the experience that nontraditional students of color have in the AP US History class. The concept of figured worlds and positional identity provides a lens through which to analyze the culture of the APUSH classroom as developed by the interactions between the individuals

(participants, other students and teacher) within the class and the curriculum and pedagogy presented in the class.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical race theory has been used across a wide array of disciplines by scholars to explore and challenge inequities that are the result of race-based power relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Within educational research in particular, CRT is a “radical critique of both the status quo and purported reforms” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). For this study, CRT provides a fitting frame through which to analyze how Black and Latinx students, two racial/ethnic groups that have been traditionally barred from the academically elite Advanced Placement program and its advantages by unintentional and intentional institutionalized racist practices, navigate the AP culture and the racially/culturally sensitive curriculum of US history that depicts the birth and rise of nation built on the domination and subjugation of minority peoples. The study relies on the voice of the students to present their experience and their ability to recognize how their race/ethnicity influences their interpretation of the curriculum and the interactions that they have with individuals in the class.

**Positional identities within figured worlds.** Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, and Cain posit that figured worlds are cultured worlds that have four distinct characteristics: a) they are historical phenomena into which we are recruited or enter; b) they are social encounters in which participants’ positions matter; c) they are socially organized and reproduced; and d) they distribute us across fields of activity, thus the identities we gain within the world are grown through continued participation in the positions (positional identities) that are defined by the social interactions within the world. Black and Latinx students are neophytes that have been artificially invited into the elite academic figured world

of AP US History, not by the historical participants of the world, but by open access policies and recruitment tactics of systems and administrators who lie outside the figured world. This offers a complex situation into which these students enter. Recruited, but not necessarily invited, they enter into the world in a lower position, or rank, because of their newcomer status in the micro-level context of the AP US History class, as well as because of the historical macro-level lower rank individuals of their rank/ethnicity hold in society at large. I sought to understand how students perceived their position and if this perception influenced (positively or negatively) their engagement and learning within the class. I also listened for their suggestions of ways they believe interactions or pedagogy could be shifted to improve, if necessary, their perception of their positional identity within the class.

### **Sample and Population**

**Site Selection.** This study was conducted at Sunset Mountain High School (SMHS). SMHS is a large, diverse high school within a suburban city located in the Southwestern region of the United States. SMHS serves approximately 3,500 students in grades 9 through 12. Approximately 36% of the population qualifies for free or reduced lunch, 47% of the population is White, 40% are Hispanic, 6% are Asian, 3% are African American, 3% are Filipino, with less than 1% American Indian or Alaska Native and less than 1% Pacific Islander. The school has seen a shifting community and demographic in the last two decades which is worth mentioning for the purposes of this study. A snapshot of the school's WASC accreditation report notes the following:

Over the past five decades, the community of (city name removed) has changed from a rural and agrarian-based economy to a thriving suburban community with a vibrant mixed economy. New home construction fueled the growth of the city, including over 3,000 homes built since 2001 in the (name removed), a master planned community on the west side of the city. Since

2000, the population has grown from 54,977 to 93,295. According to the real estate agents in the community, many families with school-age children select (city removed) due to the reputation of the schools within (school district name removed). Demographically, (city removed) is a young, growing community. As of 2018, 29% of (city removed) residents were under the age of 18 with only 10% of residents over 65. In addition to serving (city removed) families, (district name removed) boundaries include students from bordering sections of (3 city names removed) and some unincorporated areas of the county. The significant population changes have propelled the growth of (district name removed), both in terms of academic achievement and student enrollment.

Two middle schools feed into SMHS: Seaside Middle School and South Main Middle School. These two middle schools are dramatically different in terms of student demographics (socioeconomic, ethnicity, percentages of English learners, home language) and student performance. South Main Middle School located on the east side of the city, opened in 1980 as the first middle school to serve the students of (district name removed) and is a Title 1 school. Seaside Middle School opened in the fall of 2004 to serve the growing community of (name removed). The median income for families in the city of (name removed) is \$63,400 and the (name removed) community shows the median income is \$82,347. This highlights the dramatically different socio-economic positions of SMHS's two feeder middle schools. Both schools are ranked 10 in Similar Schools Rankings, evidence of the high expectations that (district name removed) has for all of its students. At SMHS, these two school populations become one freshman class; For the 2018-2019, the freshman class of SMHS will be comprised of roughly 64% (598) SEMS students and 36% (220) SMMS students. As SMHS welcomes these two student groups, the school also recognizes the achievement gap it inherits. As a result, the combining of these two groups of students presents both challenges and opportunities.

Academically, 99.5% of SMHS students graduated at the end of their senior year and 67% of students met the University of California/California State University "A-G" entrance requirements. The school offers 22 Advanced Placement and 11 Honors courses. In the last four years, the school administration has made shifts in policies to open access to the AP program in order to bring the AP class demographics in line with school demographics. The table below shows the current progress toward this goal.

Table II: SMHS AP Enrollment 2018/2019

Race/Ethnicity	Total enrollment of subgroup	% of total enrollment	Number of sub-group enrolled in at least 1 AP course	% of subgroup enrolled in at least 1 AP course
African American	102	> 1	52	51
Asian	255	> 1	212	83
Hispanic	1,272	36	671	52
White, non-Hispanic	1,524	43	1043	68

Note. Sourced from school district student information system (SIS).

SMHS was chosen as the site for this study for several reasons. Its diverse population and large student body is representative of the state of California in general. With a demographic that is also skewing more high middle and high income, its White population has shown steady increases, but the Hispanic subgroup, once a majority on the campus, is decreasing. These shifts are representative of a growing racial and economic divide in the city itself. SMHS has made efforts in the last three years to open access to their AP program and recruit students, particularly Black and Latinx students, into AP courses. As can be seen by the table above, the school has made large strides in matching AP enrollment to the demographics of the school with approximately 50% of students that identify as Hispanic or identify as African America/Black enrolled in at least 1 AP course. These enrollment numbers are somewhat distorted by the high representation of the Latinx students taking AP Spanish and the small sample of African American/Black students; but, more importantly, site leaders acknowledge that despite the increase in enrollment, there is a persistent achievement gap in the grades and AP exam performance between African American and Latinx students and their White and Asian peers. This phenomenon of increased enrollment but lagging achievement of African American and Latinx students is mirrored in national AP data; thus



the focus of this study on the exploration of experience of nontraditional students of color that have already entered into and are navigating the figured world of AP.

**Participant selection.** Students were selected from the target site using purposeful homogeneous recruitment. Students were narrowed down from an initial list provided by the school administration based on the following criteria: identified as Hispanic, Black, or multi-racial; QUEST alumna; enrolled in APUSH. All students from this broader list were invited to participate in the study and eight students showed interest. The eight was narrowed to five based on a need for a cross-section of gender and racial identities and the preference for all students to be with a singular teacher.

This yielded five students, 3 male and 2 female, for the study. Due to the small number of Black/African American students at the school in general, I was unable to identify students who identified as solely African American to participate. Therefore the participants identified as Mexican/Mexican American (2 males, 1 female) and multi-racial, specifically Afro-Latinx (1 male, 2 female). Students were enrolled with the same teacher, but at different periods during the day; this allowed me to hear students' perceptions about specific pedagogical decisions made by a teacher and to gauge if either the teacher's choices or the students' perception about these choices changed with different students and/or classroom demographics.

All students chosen were members of the QUEST program that was developed at SMHS in 2016. QUEST began as a 9th grade program to address inequities observed among students transitioning into the high school, with a goal to introduce nontraditional students into the honors/AP and leadership (e.g. ASB) pathways at the school. These students had not initially planned to enroll in honors courses in 9th grade, but were identified by middle school

teachers as students with both academic and leadership potential; they were then recruited into the program where they were cohorted into QUEST English Honors 9, QUEST Algebra 1, and QUEST Personal Development. In addition to academics, students were intentionally taught executive and leadership skills within the Personal Development course. A “critical” curriculum was infused in all three QUEST courses, with students learning how to use academics to push against institutionalized practices that serve to subjugate individuals with minority status in society.

I selected students who have been in the QUEST program, in particular, for this study because they have had explicit experience in talking about race in an academic setting. They have an awareness of how their race plays a role in their everyday dealings, and have had candid discussions about the lack of diversity within the school’s more rigorous course offerings and leadership classes. I believed that this background would allow them to be more open and aware about their racialized experience in AP US History. Participants were asked to speak openly about their experience both in interviews and in journals, and to do so they interpreted both their actions in the class and the actions of others, including the teacher. Their responses were analyzed to determine the factors that influenced their interactions with the people and curriculum of the class, and subsequently if that affected their engagement and learning.

### **Data Collection**

**Purpose of the study and research questions.** The purpose of these narrative case studies was to explore how students perceive their race influences their positioning in an Advanced Placement classroom, and if that positioning influences their engagement and learning in the class. Moreover, it allowed a specific group of students who have traditionally

been underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses to voice their perceptions of and needs from the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the people in AP US History to improve their learning experiences. The following research questions guided this study in understanding how nontraditional students of color experience the culture - the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the interactions - of the AP US History class and how, if at all, that culture influences their positioning and engagement in the class: In what ways, if any, do the perceptions of nontraditional students of color about their identity and position within the figured world of AP United States History affect their learning and engagement with the class?

1. What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do nontraditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within the academically rigorous figured world?
2. What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement?
3. In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?

**Timeline.** Table III, indicating the general time period of data collection, the data being collected, and rationale of the collection can be reviewed below. Within the approximately 6-month study, student recruitment occurred in November, with the first interviews scheduled and conducted in January and February. Students were given instructions for their journals at the time of their first interview. While some students chose to journal weekly; I gave them the option to choose when and how they would journal. As a

result, some students, in fact, completed a single journal each week, while others did several in one sitting typically later in study timeline.

Table III: Timeline of study

<b>Time Period/AP Unit of Study</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Journals</b>	<b>Document analysis</b>
<b>Nov 1 – Nov 16/Period 4: 1800-1848</b> Key concepts: Agrarian republic, south and slavery, growth of democracy, industry and the North, social reformers & a new age			APUSH course outline & requirements
<b>Nov 26 – Dec 14/Period 5: 1844-1877</b> Key concepts: Territorial expansion, civil war and reconstruction	Student recruitment and set up of round 1 interviews		Progress report grades
<b>Dec 17 – Dec 20</b> Finals Week			
<b>Dec 21 – Jan 11</b> Schools closed, winter break			Semester grades
<b>Jan 14 – Feb 1/Period 6: 1865-1898</b> Key concepts: 2 <sup>nd</sup> industrial revolution, labor unions, “New South”, farmers & the Populist Party, rural to urban migration, Indian wars, Gilded Age	First interviews with individual students	Begin weekly journals	Student high school transcripts/ middle school report cards
<b>Feb 4 – Mar 8/Period 7: 1890-1945</b> Key concepts: Progressive era, WWI, government programs and liberalism, “new immigrants”, foreign policy	First interviews with individual students	Weekly journals	Student high school transcripts/ middle school report cards
<b>Mar 11 – Mar 29/Period 8: 1945-1980</b> Key concepts: containing communism, segregation and equality (civil rights movements), liberals v. conservatives	Focus group interview	Weekly journals	APUSH textbook
<b>Apr 1 – Apr 5</b> Schools closed, spring break			APUSH textbook  Progress report grades
<b>Apr 8 – Apr 19/Period 8 + Period 9: 1980-present</b> Period 9 Key Concepts: reduced role of government, new technology, demographic shifts, war on terror	Start of second interviews	Weekly journals	APUSH textbook
<b>April 22 – May 10</b> No data collection from students. Review period, AP test May 10			
<b>May 13 – May 24</b>	Second interviews	Final journals	School AP enrollment and testing data

**Interviews.** In conducting qualitative research, interviews serve a practical purpose of allowing an exchange of information between participant and researcher (Creswell, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and also serving to facilitate the process of trust building among myself and the students (Bourgois, 1996). The qualitative interview helps the researcher to get in-depth information around a topic and, when formulated appropriately, encourages the participant to share rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Warren & Karner, 2005; Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008). The individual interviews were conducted using open-ended and semi-structured questions. Used in some qualitative research as the sole data source, semi-structured interviews are organized around a set of predetermined questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the participant and the interviewer (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Procedurally, the interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and saved on a password protected computer. Both the interview questions and the procedures were refined to ensure that the high school students were able to access and understand the research and the questions completely. I noted the body language and verbal participation of students to assess their comfort and to determine if they no longer want to be a part of the interview process. Following each interview, I memoed initial impressions and questions. All interviews were transcribed and placed in the password protected Google Shared Drive that each individual student participant and I shared. Students had the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy.

*First individual interview.* The first interview took place at the students' school site and lasted approximately thirty minutes. The foundational questions can be found in Appendix D. In this first interview, students were asked about their perceptions of

race/cultural relations on the school campus at large, including how they felt the school responded to the various demographics, how the student body interacted with each other, and how their own identities shaped how they navigated their school experience. In this first interview students also discussed their experience as nontraditional students in honors and advanced placement classes, chronicling both their preparation for and comfort in their current APUSH course.

*Focus group interview.* Approximately seven weeks after the first individual interviews and journal writing had begun, I conducted a focus group interview with all of the participants. The focus group occurred at the students' school site and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. One student participant led the group conversation, while I observed and asked occasional clarifying questions. The group was asked to respond to a single prompt to begin the discussion: nontraditional students have equal opportunity to access and have success in AP classes.

*Second individual interview.* The last set of individual interviews occurred after the focus group interview. Informed by my initial gleanings from the students' journals, the focus group interview and the literature related to CRT and positional identities, these relatively unstructured interviews had open-ended questions and were more or less "guided conversations" (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). There were approximately two weeks remaining in the semester, the AP content of the APUSH course was complete, and students had taken the national AP exam. The interviews took place at the students' school site and lasted approximately thirty minutes. The list of interview questions can be viewed in Appendix H. In the final interview students were asked to reflect on their experience in the APUSH course and to provide insight into the actions and interactions they experienced with

teachers, peers, and the school at large that either helped or hindered their experience in Advanced Placement.

**Journaling.** Student journaling was the second form of data collection used for the study. Czarniawska (2004) mentions three ways to collect data for narrative studies: recording spontaneous storytelling, eliciting stories through interviews, and asking for stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) add to this list by suggesting the collection of field texts, which could include a wide array of sources such as fieldnotes, letters, documents, and journals. In this case, student journaling allowed students to document their experience, and gave them the opportunity to quickly document their reaction to peer or teacher actions and the curriculum.

After the first interview, students were asked to begin their journal process. Students were given suggested prompts, but were told they could veer off of these; generally, though, students responded to the prompts provided. A new prompt was given to students on a weekly basis, however, students had the freedom to answer prompts as time permitted in their schedule. As a result, some students answered numerous prompts in a single sitting, others answered weekly or biweekly. Journal writing continued for approximately twelve weeks, through the end of the school year. Appendices E and F list the prompts that were provided; not all students answered all prompts.

Students had the option to use traditional written journals or audio journals. The audio journals allowed for students to quickly and candidly share their thoughts about their experiences with a medium they are familiar. Three students chose this option; they used their cellphones or computers to record their journal entries and uploaded the audio to the secured Google Shared Drive that is shared only between the participant and myself. In the same

process as the interviews, audio journals were transcribed and placed in the Google Shared Drives for student review prior to the analysis process. One student wrote journals via Google Docs and shared in the secured Team Drive. Despite multiple attempts and reminders, one student did not complete any journal entries.

**Document analysis.** A third aspect of data collection was in the form of document analysis. Reviewing a variety of documents allowed for a triangulation of data that also included the interviews and student journals. I reviewed documents from the College Board Advanced Placement portal website which included the course curricula and outline for Advanced Placement United States History, course requirements, and suggested instructional methodologies.

At the local level, I inspected SMHS honors and AP course enrollment data, AP grades by race/ethnicity, AP pass rates, and publicized AP policies. I also reviewed student participant middle school report cards, high school transcripts, and AP exam results. Analysis of these documents offered insights regarding the culture of the AP US class and helped to corroborate information gleaned from the other two methods.

Lastly, based on comments from students during their interviews and journals, I reviewed the textbook used in the APUSH class. I explored the text for units, chapters, and sections devoted to peoples of color initially noting the how much of the textbook's content held information about these groups. I then read these sections and noted my own interpretation of how the groups were presented, particularly in relation to those of European descent. This reading gave me a sense of reference and allowed me to have a better understanding of the student participants' perceptions about the text.



## Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, data analysis occurred simultaneously with the data collection, for as Merriam (2002) notes, it “allows researchers to make adjustments along the way...and to ‘test’ emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data. To wait until all data are collected is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data” (p. 14).

**Analysis of interviews.** Individual interviews and the focus group interview were digitally recorded and transcribed. Each student participant was treated as a separate case, with each interview transcription manually coded. First cycle manual in vivo coding was used, followed by second cycle pattern coding. I then used manual focused coding to establish common patterns and ideas across the cases to develop a clear view of emergent themes from the subject (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I referenced Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three dimensional space structure approach for narrative analysis, reviewing the transcripts through the lens of interaction, continuity, and situation.

Table IV: Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure

Interaction		Continuity		Situation	
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and point of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to the actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological or spatial boundaries with characters intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Note. Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) (cited by Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002)

**Analysis of student journals.** The students’ journals were transcribed and analyzed for major themes in order to further understand the individual experiences of the

participants. As with the interviews, I viewed the data through the lens of interaction, continuity, and situation from the three-dimensional space structure.

**Document analysis.** The document analysis process involved superficial examination (skimming), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Across the documents reviewed, coding was used to identify themes and patterns that related to the experience that nontraditional students of color have in AP US History. This type of thematic coding involved a focused reading, re-reading, and review of the data, and served to integrate the themes and patterns that emerged in the journals and interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Bowen, 2009).

### **Limitations**

**Generalizability.** As a narrative case study, this research is specific to a particular group of students' experiences in a particular class. The students are telling their story based on their interactions at a specific time, in a defined place - Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) interaction, continuity, and situation. Their experiences are unique; therefore, this study cannot generalize their experiences to other students in other classes or contexts. But that is the purpose of this research; to lift up the voices of these students' narratives. There are, however, commonalities found across the stories they tell and the recommendations they offer that will be useful to educators in identifying factors that influence the experience of Black and Latinx students in AP courses.

**Positionality.** I am a central office administrator in the district which the study occurred, and a former principal of SMMS and SMHS; as such, my positionality must be considered in the discussion of limitations. While my position does offer the benefit of access to resources and experience with the setting that aided in my understanding of the context in

which the study occurs, I understand that I did not come into the study with “fresh eyes”, and this may limit or bias my understanding. Also as the current supervisor of the secondary schools in the district, my position may have influenced the information students share in their interviews or journals; and, because I was formerly the principal and the immediate supervisor of the current principal, the students may have felt a need to protect their site administrators or the reputation of their school in general. There is a power dynamic that cannot be ignored (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and of which I was constantly mindful. The students were assured throughout the study that their participation was voluntary and would not be used to influence their academic standing in the class in any way. I also did my best to approach our interviews as solely a researcher, reminding students that in those moments that we interviewed, I was not “wearing my administrator hat.” By employing member checking and triangulation of data, by deliberately avoiding placing myself in the classroom during the periods the students were in the class, and by establishing researcher/participant norms during interviews, I believe that I mitigated, if not completely overcame, the risks that are associated with my position.

I must also consider the bias that I bring to the study. As a Black woman who holds a history in her own life of being the only person in academic classes and in work settings, I bring a bias to this study. I have lived the experience of these students; thus, I have had to be aware of my own biases and remain committed to the role of researcher. Nevertheless, I recognize that my background has influenced my approach and interpretations of the data gained during the study (Creswell, 2007). I found, however, that my background, and even bias, allowed me to gather data from students with authentic and empathetic conversation, for

they sensed, correctly, that my own experiences as student of color navigating primarily White academic spaces gave me insight, if not complete understanding, of their experiences.

### **Summary of Methods**

Using rigorous qualitative research methodology, this narrative case study explored the lived experience of nontraditional students of color in the figured world of AP US History. Through their stories I gained an understanding of how they perceive the culture of the AP US History course in general, their beliefs about how they fit into that culture, and how their perceptions about their academic identity and position in the class influence their interaction with their teacher, their non-alike and alike peers, and the curriculum in the class. As neophytes in the course, students discussed their entrée into the figured world, and acknowledged how they were positioned by their own accord and by others in this potentially sensitive environment. Lastly, these students had the opportunity not only to tell their stories, but to offer advice and solutions regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and peer interactions that could improve their overall learning experience in the AP US History class.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The study explored the experiences and stories of five students of color navigating the world of Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses, in general, and Advanced Placement American History (APUSH) specifically. Through interviews and journal entries, the students revealed an insider's perspective of how nontraditional students in these courses navigate their interactions with teachers, peers, and the curriculum. Their stories gave voice to the elements of this particular aspect of their schooling – from adult and peer actions to textbook content – that helped and hindered their feeling of belonging and success as members of an academically elite APUSH community. The following overarching research question and sub-questions were examined within this study:

In what ways, if any, do the perceptions of nontraditional students of color about their academic identity and position within the figured world of AP United States History affect their learning and engagement with the class?

1. What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do nontraditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within the academically rigorous figured world?
2. What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement?
3. In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?

Over the course of several months, I used the conceptual frameworks of critical race theory and figured worlds to conduct individual interviews and a focus group interview, and to work with students in their creation of audio journals. At the end of study period, all five students had participated in two thirty-minute interviews and one forty-five-minute focus group discussion. Four students submitted audio journals: two completed ten journals, one completed nine journals, and the fourth submitted six journals. The fifth student did not complete any audio journals, an outcome that is related to his story and will be discussed in this results section. With a study design consisting of narrative inquiry and case study, my investigation of the research questions and subsequent results presented in this chapter are a culmination of the analysis of the individual stories revealed from those different settings. The data presented the lived experience of five individual students, rich with details of everyday occurrences, their perceptions of events, and their beliefs about their place in the academic world in which they navigate. Despite their separate experiences, common themes and subthemes revealed themselves within the analysis – themes related to race and privilege, belonging and separation, stereotype and expectation, invisibility and the single story. This chapter will present the individual tales of each student along with the thematic commonalities revealed by their experiences and perceptions – five stories, five individual perspectives, five adolescent voices contributing to our understanding of how nontraditional students enter into and navigate the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History.

## **Review of the Conceptual Framework**

To critically analyze the experience of Latinx and Afro-Latinx students within the Advanced Placement realm from which they have been traditionally marginalized and/or excluded, I approached the study through the conceptual frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Figured Worlds.

CRT looks at the ways in which racial power and privilege are constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and empowers victims of racism to find their voice and push against institutionalized factors perpetuating their subordination (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In education it offers methods and pedagogies that guide efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominate racial positions in and out of the classroom. (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). For this study, CRT offered a lens through which to view the extent to which individual actions (and inaction) within the school and the presentation of adopted curriculum contributed to an environment that influenced Latinx and Afro-Latinx students' engagement and learning. An unexpected factor – the increase of nationalistic rhetoric and the broadening of conflicts related to culture and race in society at large – loomed over the study. The students made their own critical connections between the history of the United States as presented in their class and the interactions with their teachers and peers with the current social and political climate in the United States, ultimately discussing in both their journals and interviews the ways shifting societal norms related to race and culture played out in their everyday interactions in school.

The concept of figured worlds and positional identity within the figured worlds allowed both myself, as the researcher, and the students to explore the ways in which they, as nontraditional members, fit into the specialized academic arena of AP United States History. Figured worlds, as defined by Holland, et al in the 1998 seminal text *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, are socially and culturally constructed realms where “particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p 52). Despite a school narrative that espoused open access and actively recruited students into AP courses, for most of the study participants, their racial and cultural backgrounds combined with middle school and early high school experiences essentially void of peer interactions with White, privileged students meant that they entered the world of AP US History as virtual interlopers – characters with limited representation and position both in the classroom and curriculum of the course. Through their interviews and journals I analyzed students’ descriptions of their interactions and perceptions through the four characteristics of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998, p 41): a) how their actions were shaped by their interactions in the figured world, and in turn, how their presence in APUSH and their interactions within shaped and shifted the characteristics of said figured world; b) how their race and culture influenced their social position upon entering the class and how these two factors continued to influence their interactions with elements of figured world, namely, their peers, the teacher, and the curriculum; c) how their interactions and work with the teacher and their peers clarified their definition of an AP student and determined if and how well they personally fit that definition; and d) how their positions in the figured world shifted throughout the year, ascending and descending based on teacher, peer, curricular, and their own choices.



## Data Analysis

### School Context

The study took place at a large suburban high school in the Southwestern United States. At the time of the study, Sunset Mountain High School (SMHS) served 3,533 students in grades nine through twelve. 33% of the population qualified for free or reduced lunch, 45% of the population were identified as White, 38% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 2% African American, 2% Filipino, with less than 1% American Indian or Alaska Native and less than 1% Pacific Islander. 99.5% of students graduated at the end of their senior year and 67% of students met the University of California/California State University “A-G” entrance requirements. The school offered 22 Advanced Placement and 11 Honors courses within its master schedule, making specific efforts to increase the enrollment of nontraditional students into their AP and Honors classes. These efforts included the maintaining of a “AP/H Access and Success” teacher who was released for a period to organize methods to attract and keep nontraditional students in the courses; the implementation of an AP Ambassador program consisting of nontraditional juniors and seniors enrolled in AP courses who were used in recruitment efforts for students in grades 8, 9, and 10; and the inclusion of a 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade program, QUEST, to support and transition nontraditional students into AP and leadership courses. All five participants in the study were alumni of the QUEST program; to better understand the role it played in their participation in H/AP courses, I took a more detailed look at the program reviewing documents and talking to individuals about the program.

**QUEST program.** The QUEST program is a ninth grade transition and leadership program at SMHS. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, the program began with the aim – as stated by Natasha Simmons, the then coordinator of the program - of a “conscious

Questioning and Understanding of Equitable School Trends (QUEST) within the paradigm of social justice.” In a presentation to SMHS staff, it was the vision of QUEST academy to

actively challenge cultural, social, and educational attitudes towards individual success and pathways to advanced placement classes. Students are to be active participants in a variety of extra and co-curricular campus activities which include sports, ASB (Associated Student Body), Knight Zone (after school tutoring and enrichment programs), clubs, and the arts. Our goal(s) are increased student voice, student involvement, and student leadership.

Natasha – African American, early forties, afro pulled into a makeshift bun crowning the top of her head – speaks passionately about the program despite no longer being at the school. “We were leveling the playing field,” she states, “you know they’re mostly invisible when they get there, it’s hard to compete with the [Seaside] kids, just in sheer numbers.” She is speaking of the disparity among the freshman class of SMHS. The school has two primary feeder middle schools: South Main Middle School (SMMS), a Title I school with a primarily Latinx student body and Seaside Middle School (SEMS), a large middle school set in a high income, master-planned community with a student body consisting primarily of White students. Both schools are largely homogenous, albeit on opposite ends of the income and demographic spectrum. Approximately three hundred students, two thirds of the eighth grade class, matriculate from SMMS to SMHS, compared to the six hundred plus entering from SEMS. “SEMS kids come in knowing they belong at SMHS,” Natasha says, “It’s not the same for SMMS. They’re such a small group. I don’t think they think they can compete...[A]nd I don’t know if the staff thinks they can either.” This is a sentiment I had heard before, echoed by an assistant principal at SMHS, Nancy Davis:

So our former principal said something about we are a tale of two schools, so we definitely have a White affluent school that comes to us and probably a low socioeconomic that comes to us and they blend together. They’re probably

about 60/40 in terms of who comes into our school from those middle schools. The preparation in terms of executive skills are much higher in coming from [SEMS], our White affluent school comparatively to our lower socioeconomic [SMMS] school. The amount of re-teaching in terms of how do you play school, what's the business of school, what's the expectation of homework and completion and those kind of things I think is disproportionate coming from either of the middle schools.

The actual and perceived differences in middle school experiences of the students at SMHS in general, and the study participants specifically became an important theme throughout the study. The students spoke extensively about how attendance at one middle school or the other impacted their own mindset and expectations about their path in high school; and what they perceived to be others' view and treatment of them based on the school from which they matriculated.

Nancy, quoted above, is no-nonsense, late thirties, and White. She is a long time administrator at the school, and, like Natasha, was at the beginning implementation of the QUEST academy. When asked about how the school addressed the disparity among the students entering from the two middle schools, she describes the impetus behind the QUEST program and outcomes desired by the school:

*So does your school do anything about this tale of two schools?*

So, we've tried. For the last two years we've implemented a program called QUEST and QUEST is about trying to do enough leveling of the playing ground, whatever that phrase is, so that when they're in their 11th and 12th grade years they really are competing with these White counterparts that came from this different school. So we've cohorted 9th grade kids from [SMMS], some from [SEMS], but most from [SMMS], and have put them in honors classes and put them with dedicated, passionate teachers who won't let them sit in the back of the room and get Cs and Ds. That the expectation is that every kid in this class will get As and be A-G compliant and be able to go compete by the time they get to their 11th grade year.

*So does, do, different things happen in a 9th grade honors QUEST class than in your other 9th grade honors classes?*

In terms of the content and the curriculum, no. In terms of teaching style and instruction, yes. There are some gaps that they're having to fill in terms of abilities, but those are easily filled when you have teachers who are dedicated and passionate to make sure they are scaffolding appropriately, that they are providing enough opportunities, that they're really sticking with the kids and kind of demanding that they, that they fill those gaps.

In a recruitment presentation to SMMS staff, the QUEST student profile called for a minimum 2.0 GPA ("in the middle"); a minimum Lexile reading level of 800; Honors ELA potential (does not have to be in honors currently); leadership potential; and good citizenship. The program was also looking to have a balance of boys and girls and to be demographically representative of SMHS. Ninth grade QUEST students were cohorted into a QUEST Honors English 9, QUEST Algebra 1, and a QUEST Personal Development course utilizing curriculum from *Get Focused, Stay Focused*. According to Simmons, these three courses offered standards-based curriculum and instruction through culturally responsive pedagogy. Students were to not only learn content, but were to gain greater understanding of their learning "within the larger sociopolitical context" (Hammond, 2015). Though not originally planned, the program expanded to include the 10<sup>th</sup> grade year where students were once again cohorted in three classes: tenth grade Honors English, Geometry, and, for the first time, an Advanced Placement course, AP Word History. Davis explained

So what we saw in the first year is that in 9th grade they loved being part of a family, they loved (being) part of a group because they were together. But holes weren't really getting filled. In their 10th grade year those holes are really beginning to get filled and I think it's because they've had a year of "no one's going to let you fail, no one's going to let you just sit in the back of the class," so that they now have expectations of themselves. It seems like the first year was really about us having expectations for them and they just said "Ok fine we'll go along with that," but their 10th grade year, I feel like they're beginning to say I have a better expectation for myself and that they're really taking pride and ownership of their own work and when you have that, those holes just get filled quicker.

The participants' enrollment in QUEST as ninth and tenth graders influenced not only their experience in school, but in terms of this study, also appeared to have some influence in their ability to recognize and readily discuss issues connected to race, culture, bias, and privilege on their school campus and in their classrooms. A quote from a tenth grade QUEST student "Quest Academy helped me realize what is happening in the world and that I don't have to sit and wait for the problem to become an issue. I can stand up and fight for a cause before it becomes a crisis." As will be seen later in this chapter, the study participants discussed the dichotomous role QUEST played in their entrance into and navigation of Advanced Placement courses. On one hand, their participation guaranteed entrance into the virtually closed world of honors/AP and offered a two-year support system; on the other, QUEST students spent half of their academic day with each other rather than integrated with students who were racially and culturally different than themselves.

### **Narrative Analysis and Analysis of Narratives Results**

#### **Data sources: Interviews, Journals, Document Analysis**

The study focused on the lived experience of five nontraditional students of color as they navigated Advanced Placement United States History. Over a period of five months, the eleventh grade students participated in two individual interviews and one focus group conversation. Additionally, students recorded their experiences through a series of audio and/or written journals. Further data points came from a review of documents to give a broader view of the students and their experience.

I reviewed the transcripts of each of the study participants to learn of their overall school achievement. I viewed AP exam results from students cohorted in the QUEST

program in AP World History, including the scores of the study participants, and compared them to the scores of non-QUEST SMHS students in AP World History. I also compared the APUSH exam results of the study participants with other SMHS students taking APUSH. My interviews with the students and observation of the focus group also led me to an analysis of the curriculum resources for APUSH including College Board's APUSH course outline, course requirements, and suggested instructional practices. Additionally, I reviewed the textbook used in the course because all students referred to the textbook's representation – and perceived lack thereof – of people of color; the gaps in the historical record as presented was a theme discussed by all of the participants.

The following data and accompanying analysis draws from the interviews, journals, and document analysis to chronicle the stories of five individual students as they find their way in the world of Advanced Placement United States History.

### **Student Participants**

The participants were five eleventh grade students from Sunset Mountain High School (SMHS) enrolled in Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH). The students all had the same APUSH teacher, but at different periods during the school day. All five students had been cohorted together in the QUEST program in ninth and tenth grade; the program does not extend into eleventh grade, so this was the first year that they were not part of a cohort with a familiar group of students. Pseudonyms have been selected for all students.

**Angelica.** Angelica, a junior, turned seventeen during the time of the study. She matriculated from SMMS, where she had taken honors classes in eighth grade. She identifies as biracial, referring to herself as Afro-Latinx, and projects a pride in her mixed heritage. Her

overall GPA through her junior year was a 3.43. She stated that life outside of school interfered with her school work, having a significant impact on her attendance in her sophomore and junior year. Her GPA dipped from a 3.83 high in her second semester of freshman year, to 3.29 in tenth grade, and 2.86 in the first semester of eleventh grade. She, in her own words, rebounded in the second semester, finishing her eleventh grade year with a 3.67 GPA.

**Carlos.** Carlos, a junior at SMHS, was seventeen during the time of the study. Like Angelica he matriculated from SMMS. Carlos identifies as Latinx, referring to himself as Mexican American. Although Carlos had taken an honors History course in eighth grade, he had no intention of taking honors or AP courses in high school until he was recruited into the QUEST program. He attained an overall high school GPA of 3.26 through junior year, with his highest performance in 11<sup>th</sup> grade with a 3.43 and 3.33 respectively in his first and second semester. Carlos stated that his life outside of school is demanding, much of his time being spent with his family or training. He is a competitive boxer and often finds himself doing homework late into the night after taking care of family responsibilities and coming home from workouts. He believes his sport has kept him focused in his outside life and in his schoolwork, and believes that it will ultimately help him in future school endeavors.

**Evan.** Evan is the only participant in the group who attended SEMS as a middle school student. Also seventeen during the time of the study, he identifies as multiracial, calling himself Afro-Latinx. His mother is Cuban, his biological father is Mexican, and much of his young life was spent with his sister's father who was White. Evan is also openly gay and considers himself a resident of two worlds, often speaking of his ability to "bridge" the

differences among people with whom he interacts. His overall high school GPA is a 3.0, however, his grades show a steady decline from ninth grade to eleventh grade, with a high of 3.57 in the first semester of his freshmen year to a 2.0 in the second semester of his junior year, with a report card containing three Ds and one F. Evan readily states that he believes that his co-curricular activities – he is an avid Band student – and his job interfere with his studies. Of the five participants, Evan is the only one to not produce any journal entries; by contrast, his interviews are the most in-depth and he led the focus group discussion offering numerous comments throughout.

**Joseph.** A sixteen-year old junior at the time of the study, Joseph attended SMMS before entrance into SMHS. He identifies as Latinx, referring to himself as Mexican American. Joseph speaks often of his need to take care of younger siblings at home in addition to other responsibilities. In our time together, he reveals that his family has suffered economic problems recently, an issue that has affected his ability to take advantage of tutoring that he felt would have benefitted him. His overall GPA is a 2.56, earning a 2.17 and 2.33 respectively in the first and second semester of eleventh grade. Like Carlos, it is the QUEST program that recruits Joseph into honors classes – an environment he did not expect to be in when he thought about his high school path.

**Kate.** Kate celebrated her seventeenth birthday as the study was winding down. She proudly proclaimed her Mexican heritage, and spoke often of her connection to Mexico. The daughter of a single mother, she has two grown siblings living in Mexico. She plans to attend college, but has placed limits on how far she will venture for the sake of her mother. Kate is academically motivated; she took honors classes throughout her time at SMMS and continued



as she entered SMHS. Her overall high school GPA is a 3.49, which has shown little variance throughout her three years in high school.

Despite all beginning in the same cohorted QUEST program and taking APUSH with the same teacher, each student had their own story to tell about their experience in navigating the world of honors and AP. Clear themes came to the surface as the study progressed, with each student having their own individual reactions to them.

### **Major themes**

As individual stories of the students were analyzed, several emergent themes revealed factors that were notable in influencing their entree into and experience in APUSH. While not discounting the variety of personal factors that contributed to the individual perceptions of their experience; in listening to the stories of these Latinx and multiracial students – the incidents that made them comfortable and uncomfortable, the curriculum that made them more or less engaged, the actions they believed helped and hindered their progress – the things that mattered were often similar. In this chapter each participant will voice their story revealing the elements that made a difference as they entered and navigated APUSH. Subsequently, in the summary of findings I will connect their individual accounts through a discussion of the emergent themes that are introduced below.

**Middle school expectations and preparation.** In terms of access and success in the high school honors programs, the role that middle school played in students' preparation for and mindset about honors and advanced placement was significant. Dependent on the middle school attended, students saw middle school as either an onramp or roadblock to high school honors and AP programming. Across the case studies, patterns regarding middle school

emerged in the following areas: formation of academic identities in middle school; accessing honors courses in middle school; school community expectations related to honors enrollment; and matching middle school honors coursework with high school expectations. In both individual interviews and the focus group interview, all five students noted that the formal policies and informal practices related to honors enrollment at the middle school level influenced their decisions about taking honors/AP in high school, their preparation for honors/AP in high school, and their perception of their academic positioning as they entered honors/AP courses.

**The role of school provided supports.** Universally the students acknowledged a need for additional supports to help them access and successfully navigate high school honors and AP programming. They discussed the steps taken by the high school to support their success in honors/AP courses, but noted the unintended consequences and constraints of some of the practices meant to help them. Students spoke extensively of QUEST, the transition program aimed to increase access to honors/AP programming to nontraditional students of color, as a primary system of support. Two topics emerged from my discussions with the students that defined this theme: the above mentioned QUEST program as an essential help and unintended hindrance; and the balance of supporting academic self-confidence with demanding rigorous academics.

**Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.** Intentional and unintentional actions made by the APUSH teacher, alike and non-alike peers, and even the student participant themselves influenced how they engaged with the class, how they interacted with their peers, and ultimately how they were positioned in the class. In reviewing the students' data, it became apparent that the demographic make-up of the APUSH class that

students were enrolled in shaped their actions, interactions, and reactions within the class. Even so, all of the student participants revealed similar actions of the teacher and their peers that influenced their position in the class. Across the cases the following considerations emerged within this theme: the unintended consequences of student choice; self-segregation and self-silencing; and action and reaction – self-positioning versus being positioned in the classroom.

**Academic and personal identity in the figured world.** Students also discussed their identities as students – identities they held for themselves and those they believed imposed on them by others. Students’ academic identities were shaped by their beliefs about their personal identities, and through the process of the study students began to reconcile their understanding of how their racial/ethnic/socio-cultural personal identities influenced their own and others’ perceptions of their academic identities. Beliefs about their academic identities shaped their conceptions about themselves as AP students, influencing how they interacted with non-alike peers in the class and how they engaged with class as a whole. Within this theme, students discussed: insecurities connected to their racial/ethnic identity; combatting stereotypes; and feelings of outsider status.

**The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.** While the students collectively respected and liked their APUSH teacher, the students had an equally negative response to the APUSH curriculum. Students opined not only the lack of diversity in the presented curriculum; but felt strongly that the textbook, in particular, foregrounded White, Eurocentric ideals and cemented, rather than dispelled, stereotypes related to people of color. The students felt little connection to the curriculum and noted feelings of disengagement with

the course despite initial interest in the subject matter. Their discussions revealed the following commonalities: curriculum bias towards a White, Eurocentric idealism; the singular and negative narrative surrounding people of color; and marginalization and otherness in the presentation of racially/culturally diverse subject matter.

## Tales to Tell: Individual Case Studies

### Case One: Angelica

Angelica's story, begins not with her junior year or even her entrance into high school, but rather, as will be seen with the other participants, starts with her time in middle school. My first meeting of Angelica is as a sixth grader at SMMS. At the time I was principal of the school, and while time has faded the memory of most students with whom I interacted at that time, my recollections of Angelica remain firmly rooted in my mind. As one of the few Black students on campus among a majority Latinx population, we perhaps gravitated toward each other, often informally discussing her academic progress and transition into middle school. Enrolled in all available honors courses and Band – the elective course that most students and adults referred to as the most challenging on campus – she performed well in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, earning all As and one B in honors math on both semester report cards. I transitioned to become principal of SMHS the following year; however, Angelica's path and my own crossed again two years later as she prepared to leave middle school. As SMHS geared up to launch its inaugural QUEST cohort, Angelica came to mind. A review of her grades in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade showed that she continued to take honors courses in English Language Arts and History Social Science, and had performed well in all of her classes, once again earning As and an occasional B. Upon reconnecting, I saw the familiar drive that characterized her as a sixth grader, and I encouraged her to apply for the QUEST program. With the support of QUEST and a history of succeeding in middle school honors courses, she seemed poised for a successful entrance into the world of honors/AP at SMHS.

*Middle school expectations and preparation.* The interviews I conducted with Angelica feel like conversations with an old friend. Her comments regarding her navigation

of the high school as a student of color are good-natured, but sincere – she readily discusses the challenges she has faced and talks openly about the ways the systems at both the middle and high school have influenced her achievement. A look at her high school transcripts and her participant interviews show a willingness to challenge herself in high school from the onset. In our first interview, when asked about her ninth grade year she states “I’ve always, like, chosen honors. So, like, I just wanted to challenge myself, you know?” To that end she continued her selection of honors courses in English and World History along with Concert Band and a zero period Marching Band. Despite her honors background in middle school, however, she felt ill-prepared for the challenges of the high school honors program.

[I] was willing to take those honor classes, but it was just too easy for me. Like, my honors history class, eighth grade, it was all just worksheets...it's not challenging enough, you know. Math, it was like, it was also easy. It was straight out of [the] book, you know, type stuff... I mean I don't really mind, but it's like, it would be good if it was a little more challenging, you know what I'm saying? To prepare us. I came into high school and then history hit me...I took freshman year history [be]cause I wanted to, you know? And I didn't know that we didn't have to, so I took it. And I was like, okay, well, you know, I took honors in eighth grade, so I'm gonna take honors history freshman year. And I took it and it was so different. I had to do notes every week. It was like AP lit and I was like what is this, you know? I was comparing it to my eighth grade class...And I was like, that class was too easy. I really look back and I had an A plus in that class and I was like, damn, you know, did I really do that well?

As she talks about her middle school experience, I note that she suggests her lack of preparation is a result of not individual teachers, but rather a systemic issue related to where she went to school and the lack of challenge for students. In the focus group discussion, the students noted their perceptions of the differences in expectations and opportunities for students attending the majority Latinx, low-socioeconomic SMMS and the majority White, high-income SEMS. Her fellow SMMS alumni commented on their perception of the

school's failure to emphasize honors or encourage students to take honors and Angelica reiterated her belief that even within the honors courses, the classes were not rigorous enough.

Well from my perspective...the honors History class I took in eighth grade was not pushing. Everything was based off of worksheets and it was just easy curriculum. So I guess you could say that coming from SMMS we weren't pushed to challenge ourselves as we are now in high school...

In her second interview, Angelica and I continue this topic as it related to students' ability to access and succeed in honors and AP courses when they matriculated to the high school.

*[T]his morning we are going to actually do a little bit of a continuation of the question that came up in our focus group. Um, which was do you believe, um, that there is equal access or equal opportunity for nontraditional students to access and to have success in AP courses...what are your thoughts now that you've had some time to think about it?*

[W]ell I think that as someone who comes from like the low income area... that we do have those equal opportunities but they're not presented equally to us. You know, like when [Evan] was talking, he was saying that, oh, they give all those opportunities at [SEMS]. Like they offer those classes and support and, you know, they have the tutors and everything, but at [SMMS], they don't. They will tell you, oh there's honor classes, but they won't like force you to take them or they won't tell you about tutoring. Not until you're actually failing, you know, not until it comes up as like, you know, a major issue. So I think that, yeah, we do, we all have that equal opportunity it's just not equally presented depending on the area as well. You know, [be]cause it's low income...[t]hey weren't as preparing.

The matter of fact way in which she discusses this discrepancy takes me aback, as does her belief that they “all have that equal opportunity.” It is a disconcerting contradiction that I notice in my conversations with all of the participants from SMMS – an understanding and seeming acceptance that the expectation and level of rigorous coursework at their middle school is lower, subsequently leading to them being underprepared for entrée into high school honors/AP courses; and yet, a belief that the system as a whole has presented them with the same opportunities as their privileged peers from SEMS to be successful.

Angelica's discussions of her perceptions of her preparation bleed into the supports that she believes have helped her transition into and remain in the honors/AP program at SMHS.

*The role of school provided supports.* Each of the students had their own perspective of the effectiveness of the supports provided by the schools at large and by their teachers. The import of the QUEST program was discussed extensively. Interestingly, similar to their thoughts surrounding middle school expectations, students also perceived a disparity in how they were supported in the middle school honors program. I was interested to hear Angelica's thoughts on this, as she participated in the honors program for her entire three years. In our second interview she discusses this discrepancy.

*Do you have this perception or this sense that classes at [SEMS] were more difficult or challenging?*

Well, yeah, like the way [Evan] put it (referring to the focus group interview). He said...they offer like, you know, help for those classes too. So it sounds like it was kind of challenging, you know. But at my school I never heard about tutoring for history or tutoring for math. I never heard that there was afterschool tutoring and anything like that. Maybe just like the teacher would offer help, you know, to see [him] after class. But it was never like, oh, we have this room set up for anyone who struggles in math, you know, it wasn't like that.

While it is clear that Angelica did not take advantage of tutoring, I wonder if the case is that there was not tutoring available or if tutoring was not offered or advertised to her because she was an A student. In either case, this perceived lack of access appears to have developed in Angelica a sense of self-sufficiency, that for better and sometimes worse, followed her into high school. I ask her about the availability of tutoring when she entered high school.

*[S]o when you got here, was there tutoring for your honors and AP courses that you knew about?*



[Y]eah, there was like Knight Zone, but I never really went [be]cause I wasn't failing, you know. I was always on track. But it was kind of difficult because I wasn't comfortable reaching out to those resources because I never had – well it's not that I never had them – I just never [had] been open to them, you know? But I started using those resources when the grades really started kicking me in the butt; you know, like sophomore year.

For Angelica, it is the QUEST program, and particularly her cohorted AP World class that opens her mind to tutoring. When her grades started falling, she appreciated her teacher's approach to offering extra help

*So sophomore year you started using them (accessing supports)?*

Especially [be]cause I was part of Quest they helped me a lot too...

*And what did you access?*

Well I went to – [be]cause Ms. [Mason] would do this – like we all had to go to tutoring, like *had to, had to*, so I was like, fine, I would go and it really helped me. I went from like a D to a B. I was like, whoa. Yeah. So Ms. [Mason] was really trying to help. It's a great one. They actually put in the effort to help you, you know? And Ms. [Mason] was focusing on everybody. So it was like, okay, she was great about it.

This idea of “focusing on everybody” resonates with Angelica, particularly as a nontraditional student in an AP class. Worried about the perception of privileged peers, she does not want to be singled out for extra help, but would rather the teacher encourage everyone – or as was the case with her AP World teacher, require everyone – to attend sessions for extra help.

I think it's just equal if they just presented to everyone as a whole, you know, because you can't just talk to a nontraditional kid and be like offering support and then you know the traditional kids will be like, why don't I get that support? And it's like “you guys do get that support”, you know, so it's better...if you present it as a whole [be]cause then it's neutral, you know? You're not weighing more on the nontraditional kids...Just because you're okay with the traditional kids and they're already doing okay, you know? It has to be as a whole, everyone has to do good. So you need to present it so that everyone has these resources. Like to everybody – equal you know?

I can tell she feels strongly about this. As a nontraditional student navigating AP, she doesn't want to stand out. Her discomfort speaks to the negotiation that nontraditional students must make in their everyday dealings in the world of Advanced Placement. Their status as relative neophytes, or newcomers, in the AP program positions them in a lower status (Holland et al, 1998); this becomes compounded if these students must also ask for additional help or if the teacher focuses on only these students to receive extra help. Angelica's concern that the other "traditional" students would ask "why don't I get that support" hints at a fear of being looked at – or positioned – differently. Her AP World teacher's requirement of tutoring outside of class moves it from an intervention to a tier one instructional strategy; it becomes a universal support that benefits all students. For Angelica, this tutoring requirement in tenth grade seems to normalize it for her; she speaks with ease about her attendance in tutoring for her eleventh grade APUSH class.

*And how about this year in your AP (United States) class?*

Oh, I'm doing all right. And I go to Mr. [Masters'] tutoring after school too to make up work and stuff. So I think it's like, the same...he's the same as [Mason]. He's still trying to extend his efforts to make all his kids pass.

As with her previous AP World teacher, Angelica appreciates that her APUSH teacher offers, and expects, students to extend their work with him beyond the class period. This culture of extended time and the ease at which students flow in and out of this environment has clear appeal to Angelica, made even more so because her APUSH teacher offers supports equally.

[M]y, APUSH teacher, he always like, has everything available to everybody. Like tutoring, I go all the time and there's always people in there sixth period [and] after school...Like no matter who you are, you walk [into class] and Mr. [Masters] is like, oh you have to do this. Like you have to go to tutoring. And I'm like, okay, I'll go to tutoring. So I think he's very nice; he treats me equally as anybody else, you know?

She notes that the tutoring sessions are often full, commenting that at one point the overflow required the use of two rooms. For clarification, I ask the types of activities that go on, which I learn range from test corrections to reteaching.

[H]e lets us do test corrections. We have to rewrite the questions for extra points. Like if you really did bad on the test, we do that and then we do short answer questions, like makeups. And then he gives you practice if you want to practice like multiple choice tests and stuff like that. And he'll explain if you need help... like when he doesn't really explain a topic in class, he will ask you to come to tutoring and he'll explain it further more for you. [L]ike I was taking a test and he was helping a student out with chapter 20 something and I was like, "Oh," you know? He's like being a good teacher.

As I consider the variety of activities occurring outside of class, it is heartening to hear the amount of time her APUSH teacher offers to students outside of class. I do wonder, however, if all students are able to access these after school learning and make-up sessions. It appears that much of the reteaching and/or extra help occurs outside of classroom hours. What recourse do students have if they are unable to attend these after school sessions? For Angelica, the system works. At the time of my final interview with her, the APUSH exam loomed and Mr. Masters' classroom was open for students one or two days a week in preparation.

*When does tutoring happen?*

Um, I'm pretty sure it's like Tuesdays after school, but he's been changing it a lot lately [be]cause...grades are almost due...But he usually he would do Wednesdays after school or Tuesdays and then sixth period is open cause he has an open period. So I would go during sixth period [be]cause I'm a TA. So I would ask my TA [teacher], oh can I go make up a test? And she would let me.

Angelica's TA period is a privilege not had by all. I learn it is purposeful scheduling for her, the sixth period non-curricular class operating much like a "study hall"; a concession made to mitigate her absences and tardies, and that allows her the time to make up missed assignments and assessments. She has, in her words, "a lot going in [her] life," but this, along

with the flexibility of her APUSH teacher in particular, allows her to remain in control of her studies and, ultimately, successfully pass the course.

The opportunity to participate in extended learning certainly helps Angelica in her AP experience; however, in talking with her and other participants, a central aspect of her support system came from the QUEST program. For Angelica, the fact that she was “recruited” (Holland et al, p 41) into the program was an appeal. “[Q]UEST, like they had chosen me and I was like, oh, like I want to do this. Like I want my sister to be in this program too!” The program offered both academic and social support, becoming a bridge to the environment of traditional honors and AP courses. In this cohort model, students of similar backgrounds came together in the ninth grade honors and tenth grade Advanced Placement course, mitigating one aspect of the neophyte’s entrance into figured world – feeling and being treated like an outsider. Angelica discusses the difference in diversity between her QUEST AP World class and her APUSH class (Interview 1/1).

In my AP World class, I want to say there was one third White and then like, two thirds Hispanics and maybe, I don’t know if there was Asian...But I just remember my friends, like Hispanics, [were] dominant. I turned and there was my friend. It was like, oh, these are people I know...[t]hen when I went into APUSH, it was like Whites and just a small number of Hispanics and I was like, oh yeah. So it was like a switch, I dunno.

With all of the participants, I wanted to know if the QUEST program influenced their continued participation in Advanced Placement. As a school support, did the QUEST model positively influence students’ entree into this world? I ask Angela in her second interview.

*Do you think that nontraditional students...if you are a non-QUEST kid, would you have, would you be in an AP class? Thinking about your peers who are low income, or minority, et cetera*

I think, yeah, I would have been in an AP class, but I wouldn’t be as confident. Like I think, sophomore year if I wasn’t in QUEST I would have taken AP World but I probably wouldn’t have taken APUSH this year. You know,

[be]cause they really helped...like AP World with Ms. [Mason] was really like lenient and everything. So I think that she kind of helped me boost my confidence into thinking I can do APUSH...I took APUSH and everything and I'm doing better than I did in AP World. [B]ecause I used a lot of Ms. [Mason's] support and now this year, I took the resources...you know, as my own.

Angelica's enthusiasm about QUEST and its influence in her decision to take APUSH appears to be multi-dimensional. The model of cohorting students who are racially and culturally similar gives her a comfort level in her honors/AP classes; additionally, the fact that she was recruited into the program also builds her confidence, leading me to believe that these structural components of the program have positively influenced her AP experience. She, also, though, mentions extensively the role that her AP World teacher played in her self-belief and her academic preparation. Would Angelica have been as comfortable or felt the program offered her as much support if her teacher had been different?

*Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.* The above question – the influence of a teacher on students' experience in class – is not a revelation. In this study, the specific actions that teachers took, and even their inaction at times, had clear ramifications for each of the participants. The influence of teacher attitudes and instructional choices were not wholly surprising, the subtler actions, however – choices made about student seating, for example – were unexpected. The students spoke extensively about two teachers in particular, their AP World and APUSH teachers, both of whom were well liked by all of the participants. Each student, though, had their own perception of how these AP teachers advanced or impeded their personal interaction with peers and curriculum of the class, and ultimately, how they engaged as nontraditional students in the figured world of Advanced Placement.

Angelica's reaction to her AP World teacher is common among the participants. She mentions on multiple occasions her appreciation of Ms. Mason's role in helping her navigate

her first AP. In her second interview, I ask Angelica to speak more specifically about how Ms. Mason helped her.

*So what kind of supports did she give? How did she help boost your confidence?*

Um, well in class she would always be making us make up work and she'd be like, you guys got this. Like AP is nothing and, you know, she always had this positive attitude towards history. It's a lot of history, you know? I don't know. She was always so happy. I'm like damn, it's history, like how? But she was, I don't know, her positivity and her support was just overall, like just helpful, you know? Like it was just helpful in general.

*Were there any skills based things that she gave you that, that you think helped or was it just this general believing in you that you and telling you that you can do it*

[S]he also made us meet certain deadlines. So she was like, she was lenient but she was strict, you know? Like I don't know how to explain it, but she was serious about getting grades up.

This is not the first time that Angelica speaks of a teacher's leniency. She mentions both her AP World and APUSH teacher as being flexible about turning in assignments and late work. I wondered how, in her mind, their actions differed from her eighth grade teacher whom she characterized as "too easy."

*So how was her [Mason's] class different than like your eighth grade honors class that you said was too easy?*

Um, well, AP World like, the curriculum was hard, you know, like the things we had to learn. But...she tried to make us understand in every way possible...we would do so many activities, I can't even recall. She would just make up things at the top of her head.... So in comparing it (AP World) – 'cause we did a lot of like group activities – to my eighth grade class, we never did group activities. It was only like, oh work in your group on this worksheet and when you're done we'll check answers like that. That's how eighth grade was.

Angelica has a respect for the rigorous content of her Advanced Placement classes, and also has the perception that her AP World teacher expected that everyone in the class would meet its rigorous standard. Despite the leniency in some logistical aspects of the class

– flexible deadlines, for example – and the positive, almost Pollyannaish optimism of Ms. Mason, Angelica never defines the class as easy, and by all accounts seems to appreciate being held to a high standard. Her disappointment in 8th grade honors stems from a lack of challenge both from the teacher and the content. She illustrates the importance of balancing high expectations with support as she talks about her APUSH teacher.

[H]e like checks up on every student - Like the grade...he's always like, "Do you plan on passing this class?" And then it's like, "oooooh" you know, it's like he really just called him out. Yeah. And I dunno, he's just very focused and...he will give up once you're like, you know, not trying and stuff like that. But overall he's just really supportive. I don't know, he's just really, he was really supportive. [Be]cause I had a lot going on this year. Like personally. And last year too Ms. [Mason] like, um, she helped me a lot....[J]ust them being lenient with deadlines and helping me with taking my work, and like letting me come to tutoring all the time. That was just really helpful. I probably would not have passed.

Like her AP World teacher, Mr. Masters showed flexibility in deadlines and offered support outside of class; yet, he held a high standard for all students, even, as she states, "giving up" when students stopped showing that they were making an attempt in the class. Not everything that her teacher does, however, helps Angelica's navigation of the AP class.

We speak several times about her day to day interaction in the APUSH class. She had matriculated from a majority Latinx cohorted AP World class in which she knew most of the students, to a much more traditional APUSH classroom in which the enrollment was majority White and Asian. I wanted to explore the ways, if any, these racial and cultural shifts in environment impacted how she interacted in class, and if any actions by the teacher helped or hindered her. I learn that in her class Mr. Masters allowed the students to pick their own seats in Angelica's class. The Latinx students, while not solely self-segregating, partnered up in different parts of the room

We choose our seats, so it's like me and my friend and then there's like one in the back and just like two in the front and like another two next to each other. So we're together but not together, you know? Like we're partners, but we're in separate places in the class.

At first blush, the teacher's offering of choice in seating seems to have done no more than create loose pairings among students. The Latinx students do choose to sit in pairs; however, they are not isolated among themselves. Angelica then mentions that there are "some Hispanics that talk to White people" in the class. Her use of the word "some" makes me wonder if students are more divided than first seemed. I get more clarity a few moments later as she described another aspect of choice that Mr. Masters gives his students

Um, so most of the time he asks us like, I'll choose your groups or you can choose your groups, you know? And then most of the class will be like...we can choose our groups. And then he'll say, okay, you can choose your groups. But most of the time I want to be like, can you choose our groups? Because I have no friends miss. I like look back and I have no friends because my partner is not there half of the time.

As Angelica continues, it becomes clearer that, at least for her, these seated pairings that the Latinx students have made are more than just convenience. Her partner's presence is the difference between her and isolation in the class.

So yeah, like sometimes – most of the time – we can choose our groups and then me, since my partner's not always there, I'll turn to my back partners and I'll be like, oh, can I join your group? They'd be like, yeah. And it's like, okay, they're probably the only two I'll go to or if I don't go to them I'll do independent work. I just won't want to get up halfway [through] the classroom and go find a partner. I'll just do my independent work.

It is surprising to me that the effervescent girl that sits before me, that I've seen in nonstop conversation with friends, and who has no trouble speaking her mind to adults, does not socialize or work with others in her class much of the time. I learn more a few minutes later



[I'm] not that, um, close with that class, it's like, I'm not even there and I feel like some of them – like no one even talks to me in the class besides my partner. Sometimes the girl in the back [will] and I'll be like, “Oh, hey.” Um, but yeah, I'm just like, I feel like a nobody in there some of the times, you know?

She has a similar sentiment in one of her journal entries stating, “My interaction in class with my peers is very minimal, I'm actually very quiet (sic) in that class and try to stay isolated most of the time” (Journal 7). This academic and social isolation from her White peers extended to outside study time as well. In one of her final journals she discusses her preparation for the APUSH national exam. It is a time when students often settle into study groups or work together outside of class to help each other with last minute studying. Angelica works alone, however, with a brief exception of “my friend [Kate] (another study participant) and I would quiz each other once in a while” (Journal 8). She also notes that while she “prefers to review things independently,” she also admits that she “was not aware of any study groups formed by other members of my class because I wasn't really friends with anyone in my class” (Journal 8).

Her comments speak to the academic and social segregation that the participants discuss both as part of the Advanced Placement class and the school at large. The teacher's allowance of student choice in terms of seating and group membership is not an active or conscious move to inhibit the connections that Angelica makes with non-Latinx peers in the class; rather I interpret these moves – the ability to choose by whom you sit and with whom you want to work – to be made to offer students more options and comfort in the class. And yet, the choices appear to be more limiting than not for those who are not fully established members of this particular world, a point that seems to be reinforced by Angelica's comments

about class participation. Her teacher also allows for student choice, or volunteers, when asking for participation.

[H]e doesn't pick on us. Like it's more voluntarily. So it's more the White people who raise their hand, you know. And then sometimes he'll pick on us too, or like I'll raise my hand too. But yeah, it's mostly like the White people. And then once in a while here and there, my friends will raise their hands or some other people...From what I see is that mostly the White people raise their hands and then once in a while I see like the Hispanics and then I'll raise my hand once in a while when I feel like it.

Angelica goes more in depth in her second interview, commenting that there are a group of students in her class that are, in her words, “super comfortable” and who are allowed to dominate the participation in the class. Well established members of the world of Advanced Placement, Angelica initially states that these students appear to have positioned themselves higher than others in this specific APUSH figured world.

I think personally in my class, I feel like there's those kids that think they know everything at the top of their head. So I think that, yeah, they treat each other equally, but they think that they're not equal. Like they, they know. I dunno. I just feel like, I don't know, there's like one specific dude in my class but I'm not going to say anything. And it's just like these kids...these certain kids, they're just like always raising their hands, you know? And it's like, let someone else raise their hand, you know...[W]e do treat it like everyone's nice and everything, but I feel like some people have that mentality that they think they're better. You know?

*What gives you that impression?*

I dunno. I just look at the confidence they have with the teacher, you know, like how comfortable they are in the class. Like all that stuff. I dunno. Just like their behavior, I can tell that – I can like determine their mentality.

Holland et al (1998) note that the figured world is established and constantly redefined by the interactions of the actors in the world; in this case how these so called “comfortable” students act with each other and their peers – and in turn how Angelica views them – is at least partially linked to their interaction with the teacher. She gives an example.

Okay. So like this kid, he will answer without raising his hand or like, you know talk to Mr. [Masters] about something off topic. I don't know just like, you know, if they were like friends. And it's like (gestures to indicate her thinking) 'Can we get to work?' You know? And it kind of bugs because it's like...we're here to learn...I don't know. It's the fact that he's so comfortable in the class. I don't know, it's just kind of...

*Why do you think he's that way?*

I don't know why. [Be]cause he has good grades and everything and I don't know, I really don't know how to tell you. He's just like super comfortable in the class. Like super, confident with his answers and it's like yeah you're smart, but let someone else have a spotlight, you know?

I press, wanting to know if it this is the case of an isolated student, or if there are more students whom Angelica would place in this category. She narrows the behavior to a group of five, two girls and three boys, all White. I ask how her teacher handles these students.

Um, okay. So one...he's always saying like stupid comments, you know, like that one kid. Yeah. And it's like, you should've been kicked out of class already. [Be]cause Mr. [Masters], he hasn't – he (the student) cusses all the time and it's like, why haven't you kicked him out or said anything? Well he does say things like, (student name removed) don't cuss in my class, you know? But it's like, it's already gotten to the point where I would've kicked him out. And then there's other kids who, they're always just like talking and laughing, and I thought it was the nontraditional kids that were like that, you know? But it turns out there's the traditional kids who are so comfortable in the class that they don't even get in trouble.

This seeming allowance of bad behavior on the part of her teacher bothers Angelica, and from the standpoint of student engagement, the dominance of this relatively small group of students appears to limit the participation of both nontraditional students and other students in the class as well. Angelica does offer her take on what teachers should do to ensure that all students have the will and the opportunity to participate.

I'd set an environment first, you know...I'd tell them to like set rules and like, I dunno, like set an environment for the class so they can all feel comfortable. So they're all like talking. Like in my class, it's always just those kids that talk, the ones that I was like [talking about], and it's never the like...it's them in that area, and then everyone else is just quiet, like no one else raising their hands, you know? So I'd be like, it's open to anyone. Like anyone can answer the

question, like anyone can talk to the teacher, you know? They should establish like a free environment, like a comfortable environment for everybody to be able to talk to be like comfortable like those traditional kids. And that way it will make it more accessible... [I]f they know they're comfortable, they will have the confidence to actually take those resources and put them into place, you know? So I think that's like one way just by setting like the free environment; like the environment is what causes the behavior and like the performance, you know. So I feel like they should establish the free environment; like a free spirited environment

In discussing the environment, Angelica uses the word “free” – that teachers should establish a free environment. I initially struggle with this terminology, as it seems contradictory to the teacher moves that she would prefer. She notes that the teachers’ allowance of choice in seating and participation, and his acceptance of certain students’ overly-casual relationship with him negatively impacts her connection to others in the class and her participation. Reviewing her comments, however, I realize that she is not looking for a freeing of rules, in fact, she implies that there is a need for a tightening of structures on the part of her APUSH teacher. A tighter structure “frees” students to participate and interact outside of their typical roles. Being forced to sit next to a student you don’t know or to interact group with unfamiliar students puts the students on a level playing field, even being called on by the teacher rather than volunteering for participation can shift the dynamic of the classroom. Angelica refers to “equal” treatment throughout our discussions. She doesn’t want to be singled out because she is a nontraditional student in the class, but nor does she want classmates to receive special treatment because they come to the class feeling like they belong.

*Academic and personal identity in the figured world.* The feeling of belonging, or lack thereof in the case of Angelica, can be connected to one’s identity in class and in the environment at large. Within the study, my initial definition of “nontraditional” focused on

race and culture. As the study progressed, however, and I viewed my participants through the lens of both CRT and their positional identities in the figured world of APUSH, I came to recognize that the participants' consideration of themselves as "nontraditional" certainly connected to their race and culture, but also expanded to feelings of otherness related to socio-economic status, personal & familial circumstance and responsibility, and even study habits. How they viewed themselves as individuals and students, and how they felt others perceived them in those same categories had implications for their navigation in the school at large and in the figured world of APUSH specifically.

Of the participants, Angelica seemed most open in her interviews and journals about her insecurities related to her personal and student identity. Early in our time together, we discuss how she feels she fits into school in general. In the first question of our first interview she mentions a facet of her school life that will come up often – her lack of friends. She mentions that she doesn't have many friends at SMHS, that she mainly "just stick[s] to my old, like middle school roots." She says that she can socialize with all types of students, but that most of whom she associates with at school are "Hispanic."

[I]n classes I can associate, like I can socialize with like many types of people. But like, it's mainly the Hispanics that come to me to talk, you know, like, when we're finding groups. People will like look at, turn to a friend and I'll turn and I'll be like, oh, like there's like a Hispanic over there, so I'll go with the Hispanics, you know? The White people behind me they're like grouping up and I'm like, okay, maybe I should join them, but then the Hispanics look at me and I'm like, okay, we can be buddies.

Her description of group dynamics foreshadows her later admissions regarding the lack of integration within groups in her APUSH class. When given the choice, the students, including herself, choose to remain connected with their racially/culturally homogenous groups. I ask her if she finds that she is treated any differently because she is Hispanic and

tends to remain with a friend group that is also primarily Hispanic. Initially, her answer is somewhat cryptic.

I think I've had some pretty nice teachers; I think they've all treated me equally. [Be]cause if I see something, like when they don't treat me equally, I will say something myself. I will talk to Ms. [Davis] or something...I feel like in the past I've had some pretty great teachers, but I mean there are some teachers that I don't have a close relationship with and I don't think like a factor is race, but I think it's just because we're not like, you know, like that close.

As I listen, the response feels contradictory. Angelica says that she believes her teachers treat her equally, and yet, she also states that when they don't treat her equally she will say something. She has a clear respect for her teachers and I wonder if at this stage of the study – a mere five minutes into our first interview – she is unwilling or unable to speak more deeply about this. I continue my questions by asking her about her interactions with students. She recounts an experience in dance class from her tenth grade year.

Okay. Yeah. So, um, I was in dance class...sophomore year and...you could choose your own groups. And me and my friends, like we were all the Hispanic group and then there was the White group and there was like the Asian [group] and there was like the mix.... And one day, so this White girl, she was like, she thought she had the power to ask me for the ox cord when I had already, I was already playing my music. She just like stuck her hand out to me, like telling me to hand it over, but she didn't say anything and I was like, no, I'm not gonna hand it to you. Like, who do you think you are? You know?

And I went to Ms. [Davis] about this and she was saying like, um, I want to know what happened, but all I know is that I didn't want to fight her.... and like they told me, oh, you can't threaten her. I don't know why they thought I would threaten her maybe [be]cause I seemed like pretty mad or something. But the way that, um, I see it was that they like didn't really tell her anything. I was just the only one putting up with it. I was like really mad. Like I cried, I was frustrated. How are you going to just like think? How do you have the audacity to go up to someone like that, you know? Like, who do you see me as?

That's what I was thinking. Maybe she thinks like, [be]cause I look like, I don't know if I look like I'm from the ghetto, but I am from a low like, you know, um, low status area. And I don't know why she saw me like that, but she

thought she had some power over me that she had to make that hand gesture.  
And I was like, hmm...

Her choice to tell this particular story is revelatory. In it Angelica begins to connect the behavior of both the White student and Ms. Davis to her racial identity and her socio-economic background. Her anger is twofold, one at the student for her initial expectation that Angelica would yield to her, and the other with Ms. Davis for what Angelica assumes is a lack of consequence for the girl. In this moment she believes that her race, her culture, and/or her social class affected the way she was treated. She uses the word power, “she thought she had some power over me”, and I think of Angelica’s positional identity. A White peer has positioned her lower and her frustration, even a year later, is clear. She continues the story even further, and I come to realize that this is not a one-time incident. That it may, in fact, be unconscious moves by the teacher that have made this incident even more significant for Angelica.

And then like, Ms. [Melissa] (the dance teacher). She's White and they're always talking – like the White group and the White teacher. They were always like, ‘Oh, Ms. [Melissa], can we go to the dance room?’ Like, yeah. And I had asked Ms.[Melissa] before, but she took it from me and I was like, okay, okay, I don't know if this is like, you know, (Angelica raises her eyebrows and looks at me at this point, as if I can interpret her meaning).

Yeah. Like, I let it go though because I don't really care about stuff like that, but it does affect me, but it's like I can do better than focus on that right now.

As she continues to retell about the incident in dance class, she offers additional information to help me understand the seeming power dynamic that existed there. She perceives that the White dance teacher gives preferential treatment to the White students, noting that they are “always talking” together. In this exchange, Angelica and I have an unspoken dialogue. When she says, “I don’t know if this is like, you know,” she assumes – correctly – that I understand her inference. As a Black woman I understand the questioning of

motives, the wonderings about the intent of actions. Did Ms. Melissa restrict access to the dance room because Angelica is Afro-Latinx? Did she favor a different group of girls because they were White? These are not questions that we can answer. Angelica's belief, however, is clear. The White student's expectation that Angelica would yield her turn with the music, the familiarity with which the White teacher and the White students conversed, and the denial of access to the dance room together fueled Angelica's perception that she was not treated the same as her privileged, White peers. And while she stated that she doesn't "really care about stuff like that," the incident gives me greater insight as to why in her later comments she is so concerned with her AP teachers implementing an "equal environment" for all students.

As we spend more time together, Angelica's perceptions about how privileged peers view her, and her insecurities that surround that perception, become clearer. When I ask her about how she thinks she is viewed by her classmates in AP, she assumes that she is viewed poorly – positioned lower – because of her attendance.

*How do you think you are viewed by the class? By the other students?*

Me. Oh God. I feel like they see me as like the no show, like the one that hardly goes to school. Like I don't know. I feel like I'm never there. I take therapy so in the morning I'm not there almost like two times per week. And it's like, where is she, you know? Like she must be failing or something. They probably think that. And then, I'm also like, I'm also quiet... I know I'm this big talker, like they don't know that, you know? But they see me as like the shy no show. She's probably like, who knows what's up with her, you know? I'm probably that girl, I feel like I'm *that* girl.

Angelica's circumstance is unique among the participants. Her frequent absences due to her therapy sessions leave her feeling isolated. She assumes that her classmates don't think she belongs in the class and she positions herself lower because of her attendance issues. In that same discussion she adds



I don't put in as much work as I should be putting in. I like put in the minimal effort. Do you know what I'm saying? So that's why I feel like I don't, um, I don't know. That's why I'm not that um, close with that class...

She recognizes that her absences are affecting her overall work in the class and her ability to engage fully. When I ask her if she thinks her engagement would be different if she were present in class more she says

I think I'd be more involved. Maybe talk more to the students. Yeah. And like, most of the time I don't know what's going on. So I'd be like more proactive and know what's going on and stuff. So maybe I think it would impact how I would be in the class.

The reality for Angelica is that her life outside of school is impeding her ability to engage fully in the class. She knows that it influences how students in the class view her and interact with her. She understands why students would view her differently, and feels a burden of the broader implications of her actions in APUSH. In her journaling she writes

I feel like in my class I face the stereotype of being that ONE black girl that hardly shows up to APUSH and is barely passing. Basically the stereotype of a black girl with no motives or goals.

She believes her actions feed into stereotypes and is one reason she chooses to self-isolate in class. Her perception is that her classmates don't think she is a hard worker, don't think she has much to contribute, and would rather not have her in their groups. As she discusses these ideas in her interview, she introduces her own biases into the conversation.

[I] have a lot going on so I don't have the time to be like studying about Jim crow laws. You know, I have like so much going on. Like I can't even focus on the unit nine test. Like I can't, it's just hard for me [inaudible] I feel like White people have it easier in some way, and I'm out here struggling, like yeah, that's crazy.

Her beliefs about how others view her and her perception that the White students have it "easier" places a barrier between her and her peers. She deduces that this may be a reason that other nontraditional students also choose not to participate in class.

I feel like other people have other things going on, you know? And it's like I said, it's dependent on how you, how much you put into it....

[I] like look back and I have like no friends because my partner is not there half of the time. That's why I feel like he has sometimes things going on [be]cause he's never there. I'm never there. And then it's like "why are they never there?"

As in her earlier comments relating to how people view her, she assumes that other students – White, privileged students – question her status as an AP student. At the time of our interview it was midway through the second semester. Angelica had received a C in the first semester of APUSH; I asked how her current grade was, knowing her attendance issues. Academically she was still doing well, and she ended the year with a B second semester. I note that this is another reason she appreciated the flexibility of her teacher.

As I listen to Angelica's story, I appreciate the effort she has made to keep up with the class; it is, to me, a story of resiliency and perseverance. To her, however, the late assignments and the additional time after class are indications of her otherness in this world of AP United States History. In her journal she writes

I somewhat feel like an AP student but I feel like an AP student that doesn't belong. I can do the work and perform the tasks, I just don't feel like I fit the other requirements of being an AP student, such as having great grades or doing extra-curricular activities (Journal 6).

Angelica envisions the narrative of the figured world of Advanced Placement that has been built by the actors and storylines that have come before her. It is a world brimming with the academic elite, those with high grades and extracurriculars to fill college applications; it is a world of privilege of which Angelica often feels she does not belong. While her beliefs about how others perceive her may not necessarily be accurate, she has embraced this mindset. A review of her journals offers clues as to why this may be the case.

For some reason people always think I'm affiliated or associated with local gangs. However, I'm not, it's only because of my physical clothing and appearance. The fact that I come from a low-status area... shouldn't set the stereotype of me being an undetermined Afro-Hispanic "gang member"...if anything, where I come from only shows the strength I have to overcome these social barriers (Journal 2).

In a 2015 study, Ryu posited that the identities within the figured world are influenced by the larger context in which they sit; that one cannot divorce larger societal practices and norms from the inner workings of the figured world (Ryu, 2015). This speaks, too, to Holland's notion that individuals do not enter into figured worlds as equals, but that they are ranked and placed based on interpretations and expectations of those in the world (Holland et al, 1998, Vagan 2011). Angelica's belief about herself as an AP student, her positioning of herself in her APUSH class, and her beliefs about how others view her are intimately associated with the experiences that she has had outside of the figured world of APUSH. During one of our interviews, I ask her if she thinks that other people would think that she is an AP student.

No.... Because people can't even believe I'm a band student. I was a band student. Like my friend, she was like, can you believe she was a band student? And it's like, what do I look like? [I] don't even know what I look like. I don't know what people see me as, do I look scary? I know I can, like, I can see why they say that, but I dunno, I think people know I'm from that side of [town] and just like, I don't know, I think people have heard about things that I've been through, and maybe like the way I show myself, you know, my like, dressing, maybe it could be seen as I don't know, something else to someone. Some people think like I'm scary or that I could beat them up, but like, I'm just real and like nice. And if you get to know me, I'm just like, open, you know? I don't know. I think people should get to know me.

*Why do you think people think you are? You are scary?*

Um, well, I'm very, I have a straight face, but it's like, you know, it's like, I'm just trying to get through the day. Like, yeah, like I think everyone's just trying to get through the day. Like it's, you shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

I ask her about her comment of judging a book by its cover. Does she think it has to do with her race – if she were not a dark-skinned Afro-Latinx young woman, would people still consider her scary?

*All right. I'm going to delve a little bit, so if your complexion were different but your clothes were the same, do you think people would still consider you scary?*

No, I don't know. Maybe not, but I'm pretty sure they would not see me as scary because I think we all know how that works. [inaudible laughing]

“I think we all know how that works.” It is another time in which Angelica assumes that I understand the larger context of her being an Afro-Latinx at SMHS and in the world at large. And I do. Just as she “knows” that her clothes matter, her facial expression matters, and her skin tone matters in how people perceive her; I too make assumptions about how people see me because of my intersectionality – and I make adjustments – facial expression, eye contact, hair style, mode of dress – to ensure that I can navigate the worlds I enter believing that I am positioned equally.

Angelica’s racial and cultural identity influences both how people actually view her and also the way in which she perceives that others view her. It is this perception that shapes her interaction with her peers and her teacher, and, as I come to learn, her motivation to engage with the curriculum of the APUSH course itself.

*The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.* Angelica’s engagement and disengagement with the APUSH history curriculum rests on multiple factors – the textbook presentation of events, her teacher’s activities and assignments, her personal circumstances, and socio-political events happening during the time of the study.

Overall, Angelica's beliefs about the curriculum of APUSH mirror that of her fellow study participants and that of other students of color experiencing US history, that it is often a one-sided or incomplete telling of the story of America (Banks, 2008; Epstein, 1998, 2000; Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

[I]t's mostly from the US point of view, you know, but I want it to be more of I dunno...like different perspectives, you know, of like the different timelines. It's mostly just giving us what the Americans saw.... I feel like there's more, more beyond like the history that we have.

As we talk more she speaks more specifically about a lack of representation from the textbook. I ask if she, as an Afro-Latinx girl, finds connection or representation.

No, because we like, went through a lot in history, but they don't, um, represent us as much. Like, you know, all the things we went through. They don't talk about our culture, like Afro-Latinx culture. Like I don't see a chapter about culture. You know they just talk about American society like changing during the 19-somethings or American society changing during the Spanish American war. They won't talk about the Mexican society during the Spanish American war. You know things like that. Like be specific – they always go back to America but I wanna know about like Afro Latinos; like it's not just Americans in here, you know like there's like mixed in the ethnicities. We need to know about all those races.

At this point in the conversation, I wonder if she is being fair to the textbook.

As a U.S. history book, should she expect to see what's happening in Mexican society? We continue to talk, however, and her frustration with the curriculum becomes clearer.

They talk about how like Americans built America, but immigrants built it too. And like they talk about it too, but they say immigrant influx and they talk about like anti-immigration.... But um, they don't talk about like our contributions. Like what did we do, you know, like the main contributions, our successes. They talk about our strikes and our rights, but they don't talk about our contributions; like the things we did to get there...there are more than Americans in America.

Her comment strikes me on two levels. I begin to understand that her frustration comes from the presentation of a single story in the history of peoples of color in the United

States (Adichie, 2009). She perceives, for example, that the text offers an immigration story for Latinx people in America, while giving little else in terms of contributions to the country. The singularity of this immigrant narrative feeds into a monolithic view of Latinx culture that does not sit well with Angelica. It is similar for other racial and cultural groups. They learn about African-Americans through slavery and the civil rights movement, Japanese Americans through internment camps - important, yet limited portrayals of their roles in American history.

I am equally as intrigued with the way Angelica references Americans, and more specifically with the fact that she makes a distinction between herself and other people of color and “American.” In the following exchange she relates a very narrow definition of “America” and “American.”

*So when you say America, what do you mean, America?*

Like I don't know. I feel like just the government, just the White government. When I hear America, I just think like Republican, like White government.... [be]cause I feel like our government is so corrupt now. Like there's nothing to believe about America anymore. There could be so much more to America that we don't know.

*So when you think of America, you think of a White government. So the curriculum that is presented, you feel is presented from that perspective?*

Yeah

I press her to offer ideas on ways that would connect her more to the curriculum; that would make it feel more inclusive to her.

*[W]hat else could it have in it that would make it seem more open?*

They don't include like more primary sources. I wish it had more primary sources for me to believe it, you know? I feel like, um, they talk about like all the wars that happened and stuff and I know they didn't have the technology to do that stuff, but I want to see like written documents, you know.... I feel like that could kind of help change my view of America.

There is a distrust that Angelica has of the information presented in the text. From her notion that the curriculum presents people of color through a single lens and her belief that the America she is learning about is skewed toward a narrow White perspective, Angelica disconnects from a curriculum that she believes is bias.

It should be noted that the College Board in its course framework for APUSH speaks to a flexibility within the course that would seemingly allow for a more diverse perspective.

Although the course framework is designed to provide a clear and detailed description of the course content and skills, it is not a curriculum. Teachers create their own curricula to meet the needs of their students and any state or local requirements.... [T]o ensure teachers have flexibility to teach specific content that is valued locally and individually, the course avoids prescribing details that would require all teachers to teach the same historical examples. Each teacher is responsible for selecting specific individuals, events, and documents for student investigation of the material in the course framework (The College Board, 2019)

In theory, this flexibility in the framework would allow teachers to provide students with a broader view of the US historical narrative; in practice, Angelica finds very little variance by her APUSH teacher from the traditional presentation of history. She mentions that her teacher primarily uses lecture and notes, though a fair amount of group work is also done. In her journal she discusses the topic that was most engaging for her.

The most engaging topics for me have been the progressive era topic and immigration topics because there's so much that's relevant to the events going on today. Also these topics intrigue me because it shows the true America and how America came to be. An assignment I did for the progressive era was a meet and greet. Each classmate chose a progressive reformer and we had to research on our individual, in class we then shared who we were and answered guiding questions through their perspective. I learned a lot about how much power the government has to change our society and still can't thoroughly change America. For example, during this modern time we are facing a social crisis between minorities and the government, we need another progressive era to go down (Journal 3).

I am not surprised that this portion of the historical record which featured social activism and political reform appeals to Angelica. In our second interview we circle back around to this journal topic and I ask about the presentation of the material and student participation during this time of potentially sensitive curriculum. In her journal she mentioned that the teacher gave in-depth lectures and showed videos from the time period. In our interview she again mentions the meet and greet, and that they had a class discussion. Her excitement about the reform era is evident as we talk; she clearly connected with the meet and greet activity, as did several of the other participants. The ability to participate as a character beyond herself, to put on a different skin, if you will, allowed her to interact with the students in the class not as Angelica – Afro-Latinx, frequently absent, quiet, and insecure – but as a reformer, a progressive, on equal footing with her peers. In my memoing I wonder if the connection comes not only from the ability to pretend to be someone else, but also, for a student of color, the opportunity to take on the persona of someone who made a tangible difference in the life she leads today.

Angelica's excitement about the progressive era allows an opening to discuss topics in class that connect directly to race and/or culture; and she opens up about how she feels in the class when cultural, and in particular, racial topics are discussed.

[S]o first I remember like talking about the Progressive Era era, like, um, all the reforms and stuff and the civil rights movement. He would just discuss, like it was just a lecture. It was just like notes and everything. And we had to do like, political cartoon analysis and...they were supporting all the stereotypes and we had to analyze them. So I dunno, I was like, it kind of makes me uncomfortable even when it's not about like my race, you know? Even when it's like the Japanese internment things and, I dunno, like other people.... I'm not gonna speak for nobody, but when those things come up, I dunno, like the room, like the everything, just like you can feel like a vibe. Like everyone's like, oof, like this really happened, you know? [A]nd then when... there's that race in that class, you know, it's like you don't even want to look, you know,



it's like, wow, this really did happen to these people, you know? And it's like, wow. And so when they came to the civil rights movement, I didn't even want to look around. I was just like focused on the lecture, like nobody look at me, you know, the nontraditional kids, I was just doing my work.

Angelica's own discomfort in class when sensitive topics about African American and/or Latinx are introduced is not uncommon. Her attempts at avoidance and her wish to "just [do] my work" rings true. Several studies have discussed the difficulties that students of color face when they are a minority in a class, including feeling the burden of having to be the sole representation of their race for others in the class (Moore, Madison-Colmore & Smith, 2003; Moore & Owen, 2009; Banner-Haley, 2010; McGee, 2016). I do note, also, both the empathy she shows for other students of color who are not of her race, and too, what she perceives as sympathy, perhaps, or unease, certainly – a "vibe" as she calls it – from the class in general when sensitive topics arise. I was interested in how the teacher presented these topics, wondering if there are any teacher moves that either helped or hindered Angelica in this environment. I learn that while there were elements of discussion and student to student interaction within the progressive era topics, the same was not true of the civil rights or the slavery chapter. Angelica remembers Mr. Masters giving lectures and showing videos, while the students read and took notes. The individual nature of these activities is telling, as is the teacher's control of the environment. Limiting the amount of time that students talk together and tightly directing exactly what students hear and make note of regarding these racial & culturally sensitive topics in class is certainly a purposeful teacher move. It can be argued that it is a protective move, removing the chance of a student making a tactless or racist comment in a small group setting that has limited monitoring by the teacher. On the other hand, does it offer students the opportunity to think critically, debate, and come to shared understandings as recommended by the College Board's APUSH course guide (College

Board, 2017 p 103)? And too, does it equip students to critically understand the role race and racism have and continue to play in society (Brown & Brown, 2010)? Does it allow for the transformative educational experience for all students (Watson, 2013) as called for in culturally sustaining pedagogy? The palpable “vibe”, the discomposure that Angelica describes in class during these topics, likely involves more than just the students in class – for teachers, particularly White and privileged teachers, must face their own assumptions, values, biases, and comfort levels when presenting these topics, often with little or no guidance from which to draw.

Still, knowing Angelica’s earlier statements of avoidance during these topics, I assumed that she would have considered the limited interaction with appreciation, and found myself surprised with her response.

*Would you have been comfortable having a discussion?*

Yeah. Cause like, you know, I'm the type to speak my mind so if something would come up that they were like wrongly informed about, I would, you know, like say something and I would want to discuss it because you can't just have that misinformation, you know? And yeah, I think I would have been like fired up, a little fired up but comfortable I guess.

Typically quiet during her APUSH class, Angelica would have welcomed the space to have a discussion with her peers. “You can’t just have that misinformation,” she says. There is a connection here to her earlier complaint of what she feels is the singular and limited depiction in the text of the contributions of peoples of color in the historical narrative that is presented in APUSH. I think back too, to her journals, and realize, perhaps, a broader implication for Angelica. In several entries she refers to discussions about and depictions of people of color.

Although I don’t have a problem with Whites, there are times when I realize they believe being White is an excuse, or an honor. Sad to say that at times at

our school I hear negative commentary in relevance to the world politics. For example, “Build The Wall”. This type of commentary shows how world politics can really impact our behaviors. It also shows the huge lack of cultural unity at our school. I didn’t respond, I kind of felt stuck because I’m tri-racial but people see me only as Black because of my skin hue. I stopped myself from responding because I saved the conversation of me being asked about my color and race, it gets pretty tiring. (Journal 1)

[I] also think about my race on certain topics we discuss like are connected to my culture or something I can relate to. For example, we were focusing on traditional dances and I brought up some dances I knew from my Hispanic culture. That was more of a positive experience... There was a time when they we [sic] were discussing police brutality and it made me think about my race because the victims are more concentrated around the African American and Hispanic groups. That was possibly the closest I’ve had to a negative experience. Including the face [sic] that I’ve actually experienced being stopped by a cop for assuming I had affiliation with gangs and such (Journal 5).

[I] believe the civil rights movements of different groups were given limited time but it was equal. We talked about each group in depth with notes when my teacher would give his lectures. Also, in videos we watched in class, the speaker discussed their significance and as well as who they were. Lastly, I don’t think there were any connections made between these movements and today’s current events. However, some could be made because African Americans faced violent police brutality and still do this day with the high statistics of a Hispanic and Black male being more likely to be stopped than a White male (Journal 9).

Angelica cannot divorce her personal viewpoints about the larger socio-political climate in which she lives from her experiences and perceptions in her APUSH class, in the same way that the assumptions and biases that her peers bring from their own lives influence their actions and interactions with all aspects of the figured world of APUSH. Presented with a narrative in which the history of people of color in America is centered around stories of deficit – be it enslavement by or fighting against privileged, White individuals and/or institutions – and a present day socio-political climate in the United States that has sparked both smaller and larger conflicts between Mexican-American and African-American peoples and local, state, and national governmental institutions and privileged, White individuals;

Angelica traverses a campus and APUSH classroom in which she stands ready to face peers who may hold a decidedly singular viewpoint of her and other people of color. While her identity and circumstance have created in her some insecurities and have caused her to question at times her status and place in the figured world of APUSH; it also appears to have spurred her desire for a more multidimensional view and presentation of events related to people of color. In the time we spend together, it appears that this desire to correct “misinformation”, to speak into the figured world her own story, outweighs the discomfort that may result from her talking with her peers when these racially and culturally sensitive topics are presented.

As a Black woman educated in private and selective elementary and secondary schools in the South, I can recall my own questioning of the narratives presented in my history classes, my own unease as we discussed Confederate heroes whose statues towered only a few short miles from the school, my own feelings of ambivalence as guest speakers presented virtual tours of their restored stately plantation homes. As often the only person of color in my majority White classes, I empathize with Angelica’s longing for a different perspective, a broader recitation than the story of subjugation, violence, and revolt lived in the shadows of dominate, White society. Angelica, though, I find, is more brave and optimistic than I. For while she isolates and sometimes avoids, she also recognizes the power that she and her fellow nontraditional students hold. In our first interview she gives her perspective about being a minority in an APUSH class.

Well, I felt like there was always like a small number in a big number... I see a lot more...Whites and Asians in AP and honors, you know? And then there's like the small number of Afro Hispanics or like Hispanics, Latinos, whatever. In my classes there's like less than 10 Hispanics max. And then the rest are like White and like five Asians or something. Yeah. So I feel like, I don't know,

there's always like a powerful number, but not like power, you know, like not power, just a number...But I think a small number is also powerful. [Be]cause we like, we stand out, you know?

## **Case Two: Carlos**

Carlos' story, like all of the participants' stories, is rooted in middle school. Whereas my memory of Angelica is long, my remembrance of Carlos is less so. Our previous time together was limited to the time I spent with the QUEST cohort in classroom settings, and, as such, it took a little longer to garner his trust during the interview process. During my initial introduction of the study to the group, however, Carlos proved enthusiastic about the possibility of sharing his story, and had a particularly keen interest in offering advice to educators that would benefit Latinx students in their courses.

From the onset Carlos is exceedingly polite. His presence and mannerisms – a natural eye contact, a measured intonation – are small indicators that make me believe he is practiced in his interaction with adults. Compact and wiry, Carlos' dark cinnamon complexion and jet black hair hint at a Mexican heritage of which he is extremely proud; his logoed t-shirts, slim khakis, low-top canvas shoes – the uniform of skate culture – tempts the stranger to judge the proverbial book by its cover. Perhaps more than any other study participant, Carlos expresses both a disdain for what he perceives to be stereotypes aimed at Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and a clear focus to, through his own actions, actively engage in disproving those stereotypes. A statement he makes in the focus group interview offers view of his home life and his motivation.

I'm the oldest too and my family and my dad and my mom are always asking me to, like, set the example and to try my hardest in high school and just to be overall like a role model for them. And that puts a lot of pressure, especially on me because it's like something is always like in the back of my head like don't mess up. Like you have to set that example for your brother and your sister.

Through his journals I learn that Carlos is a fighter – literally, an accomplished youth boxer – and glimpses of the intensity and drive needed in the ring, reveal themselves also in his navigation of his high school academic and social life.

Carlos’ academic paper trail tells a tale of potential. During his 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school years, he is enrolled in AVID, a nationwide college readiness elective for students who may be first generation college students or may need extra support for their college goals. His grades are above average in 7<sup>th</sup> grade; he earns a 3.5 GPA first semester, and while not doing quite as well second semester, he maintains a 3.17 GPA going into 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Whereas he had not taken any honors courses in his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year, his middle school report cards show that he took honors ELA and History in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. His GPA of 2.17 in the first semester indicates some struggle, particularly an F in AVID; but his grades improve second semester, raising the F in AVID to a D and ending the year with a 2.83 GPA. Carlos’ 8<sup>th</sup> grade transcript seems to offer a glimpse into his mindset during that transitional year. As I would learn in our conversations, despite spending two years in the college preparatory elective AVID, he had little interest in matriculating into high school honors courses. It was only his introduction to the QUEST program, he states, that changed his intended trajectory at SMHS.

*Middle school expectations and preparation.* My discussions with study participants who attended SMMS for middle school yield similar opinions about their time there. Like Angelica, Carlos felt little push from adults on campus to take honors classes. During the group interview he shares “[D]uring my middle school experience, I didn’t, I never got pushed to take some honors classes or anything. And when I did want to take one, I had to go ask the

teacher for their signature, I think. And further, um, for their advice, if I should take the course or not.”

Carlos is the first to mention that students needed to get approval from a teacher in order to take an honors class. The requirement of both a signature and “advice” from their teacher in order to take honors is a system reminiscent of gate-keeping actions perpetuated in some academic arenas, for while students must ask permission to enter into honors classes, and could potentially be advised against taking them, the participants offer little indication that there is a system at SMMS – formal or informal – to invite students into that world.

The students generally had a belief that there was a lack of parity among SMMS and SEMS when it came to the expectation of students entering honors courses – SEMS expected all of their students would be in honors in order to prepare students for the academic challenge of advanced courses in high school; SMMS expected the opposite. In his second interview Carlos offers a little more elaboration about this.

Like how we discussed in the group how [SEMS]...they were getting pushed to take these honors courses to get them prepared for AP and that was their expectation to take AP classes, where in um, [SMMS], I mean there wasn't that big of a push to take honors. It kind of fell on you to go and ask the teacher [be]cause you need to get a signature to take honors courses, right?

For Carlos, there seemed to be little guidance or import placed on joining honors courses from the overall school community. His enrollment in the college preparatory AVID elective presumably offered direction in this area and provided some impetus to enter these more advanced courses in the eighth grade; yet, it is the lack of invitation into an academically elite world, and the requirement of a teacher’s approval to enter that seems to have had the most effect on his thoughts about articulating into the high school honors/AP program. Despite being in a college preparatory elective, and even being enrolled in 8<sup>th</sup> grade



honors courses, Carlos admits to having no intention of matriculating into honors classes in high school.

*So when you were in eighth grade moving into ninth grade, um, before thinking about quest, did you have an intention of being in AP or honors classes?*

No way. I definitely – going into high school, I just told myself, um, just regular classes, you know, and just get through it, those four years get it over with and then go to college if you can. But QUEST really pushed me to go into the classes.

In his second interview, Carlos explains that he felt that the lack of external push from middle school contributed to a mentality of “just get[ting] through it.”

I think that mentality well for me, if QUEST didn’t come into the equation, I think I would’ve just taken what I needed to [with] standard classes. Um, no AP, no honors, just to get through high school and graduate.

*Do you think that was because of middle school? Because of something larger? Why wouldn't you see yourself as taking honors and AP courses?*

I think it's a bit of everything. Um, but middle school did play a part because I never really got pushed to take honors courses. I think I only took honors history, like in eighth grade. And that kind of opened my eyes a little bit. But at the same time I wasn't gonna come in here and take AP courses because I thought I couldn't ever do that, you know?

Carlos’ belief that he wouldn’t be able to enroll in honors or AP courses in high school despite being in honors courses in his middle school speaks to a perception that is similar to Angelica’s notion: honors classes in their middle school did not adequately prepare them for high school.

*Were you successful in eighth grade honors?*

Yeah, I passed. I think I passed with the B. I did - I did it pretty okay. I didn't think, um, I thought it was going to be a harder, but it was almost the same. It was just a little fast paced. So you had to keep up with, with the curriculum. But I don't think it prepared me for an AP class.

*Why not?*

Because when, when I jumped into a, like APUSH right now, I had to almost start all over and I had to learn techniques to write an essay or I had to learn how to write good notes where I can reflect on them and then I could see like what are the important dates and what are the important times.

Like Angelica, Carlos found his 8<sup>th</sup> grade honors classes offered little to build skills necessary for matriculation into advanced courses in high school. He notes that he felt like he had to essentially start over in his learning of skills (e.g. notetaking, essay writing) fundamental to success in rigorous coursework.

As we discuss his middle school experience, Carlos makes two statements that seem to deepen the import in middle school of both inviting students into academically elite programs and appropriately challenging them when they get there. As is noted above, Carlos states in his second interview, in reference to taking honors classes, “I thought I couldn’t ever do that.” Interestingly, though in that same statement he continues that “at home my parents were pushing me to take harder classes, too.” I connected this back to his first interview when he recalled a lack of belief in himself.

I think when I was an eighth grader, I didn't really know. I didn't really push myself to like what I know or what I could learn. So that's why I think I was kinda scared to fail. But you know, there's, uh, there's, there's always trials, but you could get past them, you know? But that's the only thing that was holding me back, like the fear of failing in class and then having to do it over again.

Carlos speaks of a lack of confidence in himself, despite having parents that were pushing him to take more challenging courses, despite being enrolled in AVID, and despite being in eighth grade honors Language Arts and History. In retrospect he realizes that it was his own fear of failure holding him back from initially enrolling in honors classes in high school; and as a result, he was prepared to, and in fact, had, self-selected out of the honors track before setting foot on the high school campus. This lack of academic confidence is tied to his perception of a SMMS experience that did not adequately prepare or encourage him to

enter the honors arena and a belief that he was entering a school in which students from SEMS were privileged through race, culture, wealth, and their middle school's assumptions and expectations that they were preparing for high school honors and AP courses. Carlos did not see himself fitting into the narrative of the figured world of AP.

Because honestly for high school I just, thought I just would take regular classes and just get it over with my four years and maybe possibly go to college. But like I think my views have changed.

*So when you, you think your views have changed, why do you think it was before you came that you would not, that AP or honors was not really in the cards for you?*

Um, I don't know because I guess like stereotypes kind of like shape AP classes. Like in my mindset it was only for White kids at first, but then as soon as I got into one it wasn't just White kids, you know.

*You went to [SMMS], yes?*

Yes.

*So if there are honors classes at [SMMS], where, where do you think the stereotype came from? Because [SMMS] I know was majority Latino.*

Um, I think the stereotype was just talking about the high school life I guess, or high school AP classes, not based off like what we saw in middle school. I think it was just like rumor, I guess you could say.

From Carlos I learn that the idea of entering honors and AP at the high school was a foreign conception. AP was for, in his mind, White students; and it was a mindset changed only when he entered the figured world itself and discovered that this was not case. For Carlos, this entrée was only possible because of his recruitment into the QUEST program, which held a purpose to both invite nontraditional students like Carlos into the honors/AP track and to support them in their navigation of this world. I would learn that Carlos found this support to be both a help and hindrance.

*The role of school provided supports.* Carlos' academic transcripts reveal Cs in his AP World and APUSH courses; these are his lowest grades and so I wonder about his comfort level and confidence regarding his work. In our first interview I ask about his workload.

*What's the workload like for you individually?*

Um, for us individually, every week we have to turn in a set of notes for the chapter. So we get the context of the chapter and then usually the day after we get to like take notes about the chapter in class and then usually just look at what the chapter like contained. So let's say it was about the Cold War, we would go over it in class and then take a quiz like on Friday.

*How much time do you spend out of out of class preparing for APUSH?*

I mean the notes are pretty long depending on the chapter. It usually takes me like an hour and a half, two hours to finish the notes [be]cause it just not notes it's the big picture - first it's a big picture, which is like you kind of just look at the title and look at the overview and you write down what you think the chapter is going to be about and then you take notes about the chapter and then summarize the chapter. And then you do a timer (?) about the chapter. And then you do a hip, which is um, you look at like a picture from that time period or from that like era and you check the historical context and all that.

*How does the workload of AP US history fit in to your overall workload? And then think about your life, your outside life in general. How does it fit in?*

Um, I definitely have to squeeze it in because I have other classes too. But my main priorities are APUSH and APES and everything else kind of goes after; um, yeah, I have to put those first. And then like in my outside life, I do boxing outside of school, so I go from like five thirty to seven. So right after I get home I start doing homework and yeah, that's basically it. And then I go to sleep late, ten, elevenish depending on how much homework I have.

It is a busy schedule, and I wonder if Carlos believes that he gets supports from the school, his teacher, and/or his peers to reach his full academic potential in his classes.

As with all of the participants, the QUEST program played a major role in Carlos' entry into honors/AP. For Carlos, in fact, it is his recruitment into QUEST that changes his high school trajectory. He notes that "if QUEST didn't come into the equation, I think I would've just taken what I needed to." He has a clear appreciation for the role the program played in improving his confidence and getting him to realize that he could take H/AP courses

in high school. He speaks of two aspects of QUEST, however, that may have hindered his progress rather than helped.

In our discussion about QUEST I sense a hesitation in Carlos about the effectiveness of the program in supporting his matriculation into upper division Advanced Placement courses, particularly his APUSH class. We discuss what he feels was a rude awakening as he entered 11<sup>th</sup> grade APUSH.

[W]hen I jumped into APUSH right now, I had to like almost start all over and I had to like learn techniques to write an essay or I had to learn how to write good notes where I can reflect on them and then I could see like what are the important dates and what are the important times.

*So you felt like you had to, you had to start over. Do you, did you get any preparation in ninth and 10th grade for a push? Do you feel like, or was it lacking in some way?*

I think it was lacking in some way because um my previous history class. Um, it did push me, but I think the teacher could have pushed me more, a little harder because APUSH really hit me hard.

*[laughing] It hit you hard*

Like this was the year where I was like, dang, I really have to focus on this. I really have to keep all my grades up and I have to just keep this going [be]cause I'm not just going to like stop right here.

He intimates that his preparation in his previous history course did not adequately prepare him for the rigors of APUSH. I find this interesting, for the purpose of the QUEST cohort is the ease student transitions into these courses. I ask questions to further explore this.

*But you felt like AP world could have pushed you more. Were you in the, you were in the quest AP world?*

Yeah.

*Do you think it would have been different if you were in a non AP quest class?*

Maybe. Because I think, I believe I, well, I felt like they were holding our hands a little too much. And um, I think they needed us to face the reality where they were just like this is an AP class, you guys got to try now. Or you really have to like actually like study, not, not just like look up notes or something. So that's where I think where that could've helped for this year or they could have just let us go a little more.

*Less handholding. Did you pass the AP World Test?*

No, I got a two.

For Carlos, the supports offered within the QUEST program, particularly the cohorted AP World class, may have given a false sense of security, if you will, for students. That Carlos felt that “they needed us to face reality,” is notable. Whereas Angelica felt supported with the QUEST AP World’s elements of flexibility, Carlos feels the class was unrealistic in terms of expectations of rigor for an Advanced Placement course. He continued

I think it was a bit of my part too because I might've not taken it as seriously too because we were, she was kind of lenient with us with the work. So I feel like if she was a little stricter or really like strict to a deadline, I feel like I would've taken it more seriously and like actually put in more work.

While the flexibility and leniency may have given some students the confidence boost needed to know that they could indeed succeed in an AP course, the technique appears to have had a different effect on Carlos. It led to a complacency that actually left him less ready to take on the work of APUSH.

A second aspect of QUEST, the cohort model, which was meant to serve as a transitional support for students, seems to have also served as an unexpected hindrance for Carlos. The ninth grade QUEST students were cohorted for three of their six courses – English, math, and their elective, a personal development course. This model allowed them to have specially selected teachers who were committed to culturally relevant pedagogy and who were willing to be more flexible – or lenient – with grading practices as students transitioned into high school and advanced courses. As mentioned above, Carlos felt that the flexibility hurt his work ethic in the long run, but he also noted that being cohorted virtually segregated him and his QUEST peers from the vast majority of ninth graders that came from SEMS. As

a result, he admits that he had little reason to integrate with students who were not like him, and stayed in his bubble for the two years that he was cohorted in QUEST.

I think at first it was more segregated, but as you know you get into different classes and start talking to different people, you start getting integrated with different people. Definitely after freshman year I basically hung out with my own race, which was, well I'm Mexican. But now I go, I talk to other races... I just felt comfortable in my, in my bubble I guess.

It is, I realize, an unintended catch-22 for the QUEST program. On one hand, the program is seeking to assist a particular group of racially and culturally alike students – a demographic that the school knows has been traditionally underserved in the honors/AP program. Their time together in their cohorted classes allows QUEST students to build the skills and mindsets necessary to be successful in honors/AP with peers whom they have a similar background with and are comfortable. On the other hand, this cohort model is, in effect, sanctioned segregation, isolating students in academic courses and taking away the opportunity to interact with a diverse classroom population. As Carlos points out, the segregation made it easier for him to remain in his bubble; and I wonder if the model makes interaction with privileged peers more difficult in the long run. I begin too, to wonder if this model sends an unintentional message that QUEST students are not capable of participating in a mixed 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade honors/AP courses? Does a homogenous AP class, filled with unfamiliar characters still fit the narrative of the figured world of advanced placement; and do students moving from this separate world of tenth grade AP World have the same position in the figured world of APUSH as those who have matriculated from the non-QUEST AP course?

I contrast Carlos' perceptions of the support offered by QUEST with Angelica's views and find that much depends on the individual student. Whereas both Carlos and Angelica appreciate the role the program played in recruiting (inviting) them into the honors/AP figured world in the high school, Carlos is less enthusiastic about its role in preparing him for APUSH. Some of this may be attributed to each student's overall confidence level and personal identity; it likely is also a matter of the APUSH environment each student entered. Angelica noted that she was one of very few students of color in her APUSH class; Carlos, on the other hand, found himself in an APUSH class period that was unusually diverse. As a result, he describes his interactions with both the teacher and his classmates differently than Angelica.

*Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.* As Carlos recalls his transition into high school and his advancement through the honors/AP program, he recognizes an evolution in his thinking that shifts his interactions with his teachers and peers, and I believe, ultimately, his positioning within the figured world of his APUSH class. He speaks about his initial thoughts when entering SMHS

Well, at first it was kind of weird to see a lot of different faces when I first came as a freshman, but I think, um, once I got to know people it got easier and easier to talk to like other races I guess. (Interview 1a)

He admits that when he entered SMHS and throughout his 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade years in QUEST he had a stereotype of what AP classes would be when he left the QUEST cohort.

*Um, so did the stereotype hold true once you got out of your quest cohort of honors and AP classes?*

Honestly, I was surprised. It didn't stay the same because the AP classes and the honors classes I'm taking are really mixed, um, they're not a lot of like, it's just all around. Definitely African Americans, um, Latinos, White kids, Asian kids is all over.



This diverse class can be attributed to the school's attempts to open access and recruit more nontraditional students into AP courses. Carlos' experience in the class speaks to its benefits. As we talk more about the make-up of the class, it becomes more clear how the diversity affects Carlos' initial positioning in the class, the student interactions in the class, and the effect of the teacher's pedagogical choices on how students relate to each other. In our first interview, we talk about the diversity of his APUSH class.

*[Y]our perspective is a little different, um, than other perspectives I heard. Because your class, it seems like your period is more diverse than other APUS histories.*

Yeah. I wouldn't be able to talk for other classes, but my class is pretty diverse, yeah.

*Do you think that makes a difference in how you interact in the class?*

Definitely. I think if it was just White kids or a different race, like the majority of a different race, I feel like it would have been different. It would've made me more shy kind of. I would just like kind of hold back and not talk as much or not participate as much.

*But because you have that mix,*

Yeah.

*You are more open to speaking. Participating,*

Yeah. I feel like, yeah, I am.

*And do you feel like you participate as much as everyone else?*

Yeah, I feel like I do.

The mix of students appears to make Carlos more comfortable in interacting with all students within the class, and seems to negate some of the self-segregation that Angelica referred to that resulted from the students' ability to choose their own seats.

Um, there's a fair amount [of Latinos], in my little group, like where we sit. Um, I have two in there besides me. So it's like they paired off by fours kind of I guess [be]cause we got to pick our own seats.

*And when you picked your own seats, who sits by who?*

Honestly it's kind of mixed. I thought it was going to be like separated by race or just like how they look, but it's wasn't that,

*So everybody's pretty mixed.*

Yeah.

*And in groups would you say groups also are pretty mixed.*

Yeah. And sometimes to mix it up even more. He, he like numbers us off and makes it go into another group so we can get to talk to other people.

Whereas Angelica perceived choice to be a detriment to student interaction, Carlos' perception is quite different. As he mentioned above, he feels that the diversity allowed him to be more comfortable participating, and from his comments, let others participate more freely as well. Interestingly, though, in our second interview, Carlos admits that the class seating arrangement is, in fact, separated.

There's groups of like races on the far left; there's a, a row of Asians...And then the middle row is just kind of mixed. Um, but they have their own, they have their own little groups of Mexicans. The White kids sit in the back. And then in the front, my group or like I guess like my forward group. It's me and my friends that are Hispanic and two White kids. Yeah. So we get along with them and we always work together in projects and stuff.

From this I initially believe that Carlos is contradictory in his statements – in his first interview he says that they aren't segregated, in his second interview he says that they are. I realize, though, that while the students may have initially placed themselves in racial alike groups, their interactions with each other are different than those described by Angelica in her period. In another part of our interview, Carlos explains

If you look at different parts of the room, it kind of split into kind of like... they're split with like with the races I guess. Yeah, you could definitely see that.

*Why do you think that is?*

I think it's because people just feel comfortable with their own race or they're just like comfortable with their group of friends since they were small I guess.

*Um, what do you think that, how do you think that contributes to the atmosphere of the class?*

I think that kind of like scares other people to go up to a group or a person because they might not feel welcome or they might not feel like they're the same as them. And it might stop the class from just like flowing and just having a better vibe.

Carlos is realistic about the separation among the different races in the seating arrangements and is insightful about reasons why this is the case; he even states a reasoning for why the separation could be detrimental to the overall functioning of the class. And yet, despite the seating arrangement, it appears that the students in his class interact with each other more and all groups participate more than those students in Angelica's class. He says about student participation.

Yeah. I feel like everyone's almost the same, but I feel like the Asian group or the Asian like part of the room, I guess you could say, are always a little more outspoken and they kind of like want to give their answer out first and they kind of want to show how they're right, I guess. And the White kids always participate too. And um actually, the Mexicans actually participate a lot too.

Carlos contributes this even mix of participation to his teacher.

For me it's he makes everyone like contribute or talk. So everyone does feel part of like the bigger group I guess. Like, so when he's lecturing, he's always asking different people, not asking just a certain group or a certain person. And I feel like he also mixes us – mixes us up with different [people] in smaller groups. So that also helps.

Carlos' observation that Mr. Masters makes everyone contribute is connected to Angelica's wish that he would be more judicious when calling on students in her period rather than simply taking volunteers. As Carlos points out, he appreciates that "he's always asking different people," which does not seem to be the case in Angelica's period, but certainly seems to make a difference in the participation within the classes. Perhaps even more notably, Carlos says that he feels like the class is part of a larger community, something that was built over time in the class.

I think in our AP classes at first, like when you first go into a class, like beginning of the year, I think stereotypes definitely played a role. But then once we got into groups and like started talking to each other and getting to know each other and everyone kind of got comfortable with each other...Honestly I feel pretty good right now. I definitely, at first I was definitely struggling with like all the work and all the notes. But um, there's always like the new friends, they've helped me out, they've told me what to do, what I need to and like how to do it. So I definitely gained some new friends in that class. And definitely a new like support system I guess you could say.

Holland et. al. are clear that the figured world is an ever evolving environment, shifting with the interactions of the characters within it. Initially, the figured world of Carlos' APUSH period seems to fit the traditional narrative; he enters expecting to be in a lower position, the students separate among familiar characters. And yet, as the students interact with each other, as they, in some cases, are forced to work together, their relationships shift, causing the dynamics of the class to shift as well. The racial make-up of the class certainly makes a difference, for there is no clear majority of which Carlos, as a nontraditional student of color, must contend. Unlike Angelica's experience of isolation, Carlos' APUSH experience seems just the opposite, he not only integrates into the class, but in his own words develops new friends and a support system. He has been invited into the figured world not only through systems set in place by the school, but has in practice become an equal participant of the world through the actions of his peers in the class. It is this experience that also plays a role in developing Carlos' interconnected personal and student identities.

*Academic and personal identity in the figured world.* Through our discussions and his journal entries, I come to learn that while Carlos holds a strong personal identity as a Mexican American male, he does not want to be defined by stereotypes connected to his race and culture. In his first journal he discusses how he wants to be viewed.

I go against stereotypes...trying to prove [a] person wrong or trying to show that not everyone's just the same. Like, you go label someone something, but not everyone's the same, you know? Um, it's not so much that I don't want to be stereotyped, well kind of, but it's more so that I don't want to go in there under that umbrella. I want to show people that I'm different than, I'm not just, um, a Latino that's trying to get through high school. I'm trying actually go places right now.

I learn that Carlos is quite confident in his personal identity and wants people to view him for his merits rather than assumptions made about him because of his race and/or culture. He is a competitive boxer – during the time of the study he was participating in a national competition – which I believe contributes to this sense of self confidence. In that same journal he recognizes that his racial identity affects how his peers may view him, but he actively works to dispel the stereotypes that they may have of him.

[People make] some assumptions about abilities based on stereotypes. Like if you think about it, stereotypes are, most of them are really bad. Um, [with] different races, you know, come different stereotypes. Most of them are negative and most of them like kind of bring up that they're not that smart...I think at first assumptions or stereotypes that I've faced in class in the beginning of the year were that, um, many people didn't view me as smart, but as they grew to know me and they knew me as a person too, I've kind of changed their views. I try to be nice to everyone and always be someone, you know, I try to be a role model.

Carlos also recalls the personal growth he has made regarding his identity as he has progressed through his high school years. At different points in our conversations he talks about the development in his thinking.

I felt like there was gonna be a lot of people that weren't going to accept me because of my race at first. But then I guess like going through high school right now it's – that's not what it is...meeting new people, you know, getting to know everyone in your classes. And then I started talking to a lot of other people. I kind of put myself out of the comfort zone...

[Y]ou get into different classes and start talking to different people, you start to get integrated with different people. Definitely after freshman year I basically hung out with my own race, which was, well, I'm Mexican. But now I go, I talk to other races. Like not to be like, I just felt comfortable in my, in my bubble I guess.

*So comfortable in your bubble. Is your friend group now socially on campus, more would you say, it is more integrated or generally do you still remain in your bubble but you're comfortable in talking to other people?*

I still feel like I'm in my bubble because those are my friends from since elementary. So like I've known them a long time and I definitely want to like have a close relationship still. But I'm definitely comfortable with talking to other people. I definitely hang around with other people.

As is discussed earlier, Carlos' participation in QUEST allowed him to begin to view himself differently – he expanded his thinking to believe that he would do more in school than simply take the minimum courses to graduate. Beyond, QUEST, though, in fact, perhaps in spite of it, Carlos exposes himself to different groups of people. He remains loyal to his friends from elementary school, but as the years of high school have progressed, he has extended his friend group. By opening himself up to other groups and by making friends with a diverse group of students within his AP classes, Carlos seems to have built up his confidence in himself as a student, and expanded both his and his peers' view of who an AP student is.

*Walking down the hall do you think if someone sees you and does not know you, they would consider you an AP student, do you they would think that you are an AP student?*

No, because stereotypes, I feel like the stereotypes play a big role. I feel like someone who just looks at me like walking down the hall, I don't think they would believe I was an AP student or taking AP classes.

*Why?*

Because back to like stereotypes. Um, I feel like you would stereotype. If I was an eighth grader going into like high school, [I would] feel like, you know, as a geek, or like someone that's smart has to wear glasses or you know, like has to look a certain way. Like you're Asian or something that just stereotypes like that. I feel like that still kind of plays a role, but it's not as strong I guess.

*So what's the stereotypical AP student?*

Um, like I said, uh, glasses, you know, smart. Um, yeah, just now I see it differently. But like before it was just like, I feel like it was mainly White kids

and Asian kids. But like now that I'm in AP classes, I can't really tell who is the AP student or not. (Interview 1b)

*Do you consider yourself now an AP an AP kid a typical AP kid or would you consider yourself an atypical or nontraditional AP kid?*

I think I would consider myself a traditional AP kid. Well, in the beginning it was a nontraditional, but now I feel like I am a traditional one because I'm taking two AP classes this year. And they've gotten easier in the fact that like I've pushed myself to the limits to like study and all that. So that's, that's why I feel like I'm a typical one now. (Interview 1a)

Overall, despite having an initial viewpoint of what his experience in the high school AP programs would be, Carlos felt personal success in his navigation of APUSH. He was not satisfied with all aspects of the course, however; and we spent a considerable amount of time talking about his frustration with the curriculum of the APUSH class.

*The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.* As one whom I have come to see openly work against stereotypes, Carlos' dissatisfaction with the APUSH curriculum does not come as a surprise. He, like Angelica, had difficulty fully engaging with the curriculum of the class because he felt that often what was presented was an incomplete, at best, stereotypical at its worst, telling of the history of the United States. As a person of color, he has a distrust of what is presented in the text.

I think it's mostly the curriculum but could be the teacher too. I think that he might choose to omit some stuff, but I definitely think it's based off the curriculum mostly.

*Do you feel that the curriculum is giving you a whole picture of the US or is it giving you a version of the history of the US?*

I think it's, I mean all these stories can be manipulated to whatever someone could say. So we don't know if that textbook or the teacher is telling us the truth. So I feel like it, it tells us portion or like a view on history.

*So then my question to you is what do you get out of AP US history? Why take AP US history and what is ultimately the learning that you get from it?*

Honestly, I'm taking it because of the AP class and um, I was interested about it. I was. I wanted to see like what the US was made out of and like how it's come to be. But I feel like how I told you it hasn't been presented like overall. I feel like other races haven't been like shown everything that they've like helped develop with the US.

*I'm going to push you there. You don't feel like all the races have been represented equally. Why is that? Delve a little deeper into why don't you feel that they have been represented equally?*

I feel like that like, um, I don't know, it's kinda...I feel like when we're talking about US history, we're basically talking about White people and I feel like after, like it shows a bit of another race and then it kind of backtracks to just White people...I feel like it's, the textbook is always focused on White, White people or it's like slavery or like big topics like that. So that's why I feel like it just comes back to like White people in the US.

*Do you feel it engages you as a, as a student of color or a person of color who is living in the US now?*

I mean from my like ethnicity I guess you could say it doesn't really like attract me because I don't think that it's like, it's shown like the full context of it. But it definitely, I definitely like how history changes over time and the overall how everything changes. That's why I took it too, I guess one of the reasons you could say, I took that class too, to see the changes.

This exchange holds similar ideas to conversations I had with his fellow participants.

While Carlos admits that part of the reason he took the course was simply because it was an AP class, he also notes that he has an interest in the history itself. His engagement with the topics, however, waned, as he didn't find much connection to the majority of the course. In our second interview he offers his perception of what is foregrounded in the curriculum.

I don't think any minority group has the full, the whole, the whole like history, of their race. I feel like um a Caucasian since they've been since the beginning, since the 13 colonies, they've been White, right? And African Americans came in during the, uh, the triangle trade, the Atlantic slavery trade. And that's when you start learning about African Americans, but not never since then.

*And what about you as a Mexican American?*

Uh, we didn't really come in until like past halfway in the book. Um, yeah. So I don't, I feel like they just brought us up because of immigration, I guess you could say. And that's the only reason why we're in the textbook

*For immigration?*



For [immigration], yeah.

*Did the curriculum either in the book or within the class itself, talk about contributions of Mexican-Americans separate from immigration? Did you talk about other, any other history?*

Not really. Nothing really else came up a lot with Latinos or Mexican Americans in the textbooks besides connections with immigration I guess. Or their rights I guess.

During another exchange in our interview, we talk more about Carlos' view of the curriculum's presentation of immigration.

*And how was that, how do you feel that as, as a Latino student, how do you feel that [immigration] was presented?*

Um, I feel like it could have been presented a little better, yeah, I think it coulda represented a little better.

*Why?*

Because it kind of put like a stereotype I guess. You know how like Mexicans immigrate over here or that's a stereotype that a lot of Mexicans immigrated over here to make a better life. And I think that put it like more in our heads, I guess you could say.

*What would it, what would you have changed then about it?*

Honestly I wouldn't be able to tell you [be]cause it's like it, that's the big question here. Well yeah I don't know...I feel like the whole story wasn't told

*Okay. The whole story wasn't told.*

I feel like they just put it there to fill in like a spot and they didn't tell like the whole story. But just like how immigrants helped the US.

Like Angelica, Carlos speaks of his perception of the singular story of peoples of color that is presented in the text. Two things, in particular, strike me in these exchanges. First, is the foregrounding of White Europeans within the text, and Carlos' perception that people of color are shown only in their relation to them. Second is his statement that immigration is the "only reason why we're in the book." While perhaps not as extreme as Angelica's comments equating "American" with "White, Republican", Carlos' views do speak to a general belief

that the APUSH curriculum is not the history of all Americans, but is instead a limited view of how White Europeans colonized and grew the United States.

More so than any other participant, Carlos is sensitive to this narrow view of Latinx peoples. As one who works to have his peers view him as more than their stereotypical caricature of a Mexican-American male, he finds the focus on immigration particularly limiting. In his journals he writes about a few instances when immigration was discussed.

I started to think about my race or ethnicity and I started thinking about it in APUSH because it was...a topic like immigration and I guess um Mexicans are known to immigrate to the United States and that's what prompted it.

I feel like that could be negative and positive. I feel like it's negative because people just think that we came over here and just take their jobs or something. But it could be positive for us because we're trying to, because the families that come over here are trying to give a good education to their kids, it's like a strive. So in that sense, I feel like we were doing the good, the better part. (Journal 4)

Most of what we did was in, uh, like small groups and that consisted of just like making a poster over a time period or like talking about a certain time period. And, um, just the topic that made me think about my culture and the topic was immigration and how Mexican Americans were needed...they were needed and then they had to come over here, but then once it was over, they were trying to kick them out. And that's, I don't know, that's kind of like, that kind of sucks cause like how is the US gonna want us, I mean, Mexican immigrants to come over and help them with like, um, with labor and then right after they're done with it they just kick them out? Like we're nothing. That's the only thing that like kind of like bothered me in the class. (Journal 5)

This week we watched, um, we watched a few political videos and we saw the depictions of immigrants coming to America. And it made me think about my own race because a lot of people, a lot of Latinos come from Mexico to try to make a better life for themselves and a better life for their kids. And I mean this kind of prompted a negative experience, but a positive one too because it's showing immigrants as like bad that we're just like flowing into America. Um, it wasn't specifically showing Latino immigrants, it was showing, um, German immigrants from the gilded age. But it prompted me to think of the Latino culture because that's just the stereotype around it.

I also believe that that these political videos could have been a little more, um, cautious when they showed immigrants cause right when the immigrants got off the boat, they started working in like, low wage jobs with really bad

conditions. And most of the times they didn't really get paid enough. So that's the problem with that video. It kind of prompted, I'm saying some negative views of immigrants in general and I believe it could have just been handled a different way.

Also, I'm thinking back to that one video of the [inaudible]. It was a cartoon. It was, um, it was a mouse being depicted as an immigrant and coming to the United States and the depiction of immigrants was kind of like dirty and was also like thinking America was the best place ever. And that the roads were made of gold and like every, every street corner had a had a market and everything was so great here and there was so much food. And I think for the most part that's what America is set out to be by immigrants. And that could be a good thing. That could be a bad thing. But as it was depicted in the cartoon, I believe it could have been a little more sensitive to...just immigrants in general. We're seeing the video and they would feel sensitive or they would feel attacked almost in the video. (Journal 6)

I find that Carlos' comments in these journal entries fit squarely into our interview discussions. If, as Carlos perceives, the only story told about Mexican Americans is one of immigration, it becomes difficult for him to move past that singular narrative with his peers in APUSH. The added layer of a larger socio-political climate with polarized views related to present day immigration and immigrants, no doubt causes him some discomfort in class. The immigration narrative – both historical and current – jeopardizes his positioning in the figured world. On one hand, his interactions with his peers offers a counter view to the established narrative of Mexican-Americans, on the other, the class curriculum continues to advance what Carlos perceives as a singular depiction of Latinx peoples. The idea of “dirty” immigrants, as he says, “flowing” into an America with streets of gold reinforces the image of Mexican-Americans as outsiders and others seeking a place in an environment – a world – in which they have not been invited.

I ask Carlos if he feels that APUSH has helped or hindered the ideas and viewpoints that different races have about each other. He somewhat cryptically answered that “there wasn't a huge opportunity for that to happen.” Carlos' disappointment in the curriculum,

however, does not appear to spread to his feelings about his teacher's presentation of the subject matter. While acknowledging gaps in the curriculum, and conceding that these gaps could be the result of both textbook and teacher bias, he appears generally satisfied in his teacher's handling of matters related to race and culture. In this first exchange we discuss how Mr. Masters introduces sensitive topics.

[W]hen we're talking about a serious topic like slavery, he told us this is a serious topic, we do not make fun of this. This is like serious. We've got to get serious. Like we can't be like making jokes...

*So on the, on the topic of serious topics or different topics, more uncomfortable topics, how did the civil rights unit go?*

Um, he talked about how - well he told us it was serious and how it changed America, how like the LGBT group, um, were speaking out and how different groups were speaking out and how African Americans are just speaking out. And he made it clear that it was for the better. He made it clear, he made it clear that it wasn't a step back. He made it clear that it was a step forward for a better direction.

*What were the activities that you guys did with it? Did you have group activities or was it mostly lecture?*

Well, I think it was mostly lecture notes. I think we did one group activity where we just talked about like the main events of the civil war. I mean, yeah, the civil rights movement.

*Was there any opportunity to interact with each other, uh, during that unit?*

I think only when we were talking we were discussing about the main events. That's the only, yeah. And then the rest were mostly lectures.

Carlos appreciates the fact that his teacher warns the class that the subject matter is sensitive and that the class must be serious. He also appears to set the tone and tightly control the environment during these topics. That comes across in another discussion with Carlos.

*What would you, what would you consider sensitive topics that you had discussed this year?*

Definitely the slave trade. Um, the Nagasaki bombs that we're talking about - Nagasaki and Hiroshima, um, immigration like for Latinos, I guess you could say. Those are like some of those sensitive topics we've talked about.

*So with those sensitive topics and because it's a pretty mixed class, would you say that those students, like during the slave, when you discussed the slave trade, um, did students, did African American students talk more, talk less or you didn't see a difference?*

I think they talked a little less because they kinda like, it's kind of hard to take in, you know, like just history. But they did, they did talk, but I don't think they talked as much.

*How about others during that same topic? How was the participation in general with that topic?*

I think overall it was a little more quiet because it was a more serious topic...

Just as in Angelica's period, Mr. Masters shows a sensitivity to the subject matter and to students, but also reveals his own discomfort. Carlos, too, reveals that his teacher could have allowed "more group discussions to get different inputs or different ideas on how things are viewed" (Interview 2); he would have been open to more communication. Perhaps Carlos' summation about his experience says it best

My teacher did a pretty good job...[h]e kept everything calm most of the time. And like when it came to serious topics, he always like told us...[b]ut like the reading all the time, it's kind of boring.

Carlos and Angelica in many ways served as fitting foils for each other. Carlos, confident and outgoing, entered his diverse APUSH class as one of many students of color, whereas Angelica, whose experiences outside of school affected her academics and her self-belief, found herself as a nontraditional student in a traditional, relatively homogenous APUSH world. With dissimilar personal identities and placement in different settings, their diverse reactions to the supports they received from the school and their teachers – Angelica interpreting the flexibility, leniency, and homogeneity of the QUEST cohort as generally positive; Carlos finding the same supports academically and socially limiting – were not necessarily unexpected. Their common reactions to teacher moves that placed responsibility of class integration and diverse participation upon the students (seating arrangements), their

collective desire for the opportunity to discuss sensitive topics related to race/culture in order to expand the narrative of people of color, and their overall dissatisfaction with the APUSH curriculum as a full history of the United States was indicative of emergent patterns related to the experiences and perceptions of all of the participants.

The next two participants to be discussed, Joseph and Kate, were in the same class period, and, as such, I expected to gain similar perspectives from each of them. Their personal and academic identities, however, affected not only how they entered the class, but also how they positioned themselves, and ultimately interacted with their teachers, their peers, and the curriculum.

### **Case Study Three: Joseph**

Despite being an SMMS and QUEST program alumni, I did not know Joseph prior to this study. Born in Mexico, Joseph entered the school district as a sixth grader in South Main Middle School. It should be noted that Joseph, though born in Mexico, is neither a current or reclassified English Learner, an assumption, he mentions, that some have made about him.

During the study he revealed that he must and is committed to working hard in school despite having responsibilities in his home life that take away from his studies; the records of his grades support this. Both middle and high school report cards suggest a student motivated to do well in school, but one who struggles to maintain an above average GPA. He held a 3.71, 3.29, and 3.5 in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and the first semester of his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. While he dipped to 2.67 in the second semester of 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he rebounded in 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a 3.5 and 3.33, respectively, in the first and second semester. From his transcript, high school has been more of a struggle, with a high GPA in the first semester of 9<sup>th</sup> grade (3.2) to a low of a weighted (from a 5 point APUSH grade) 2.17 in the first semester of 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Joseph is quiet and thoughtful; compared to the other study participants, he spoke less – not as vocal in the focus group or as talkative in interviews – but recorded more than most in his journals. As we got to know each other, I came to appreciate his introspection, for when he was ready to speak, his thoughts were often insightful and thought-provoking in their own right. He is a deep thinker, and as will be discussed in his study, his need for time to think can sometimes be misinterpreted by both teachers and peers as disengagement or lack of ability, neither of which describe the young man I've come to know.

Joseph's AP story, like Angelica and Carlos, begins in middle school; unlike the two of them, however, he did not experience any honors courses during his time there; his

perspective of his time at SMMS and his subsequent transition to high school is shaped by this particular environment.

*Middle school expectations and preparation.* In many ways, Joseph's middle school path is the most representative of the typical SMMS student. Beginning in sixth grade he enrolled in the courses assigned by the counselors and simply stayed on the path to which he had been placed. His high marks in Language Arts and History would have certainly qualified him for the honors level options afforded in these two courses; however, without adult intervention, he did not venture into this arena. In our focus group interview he notes

[I] never personally took any honors classes in middle school and I think that why is because I didn't know how to. I wasn't like aware, and pushed as much as I am now.

In our second interview he expands

I didn't take any [honors courses]. And it was also just because I wasn't like well-informed on that type of stuff. I had friends that were in those classes, but I didn't really know how you got in there, so I never got the chance to take those.

Both in this interview and the previous focus group, I recognize that Joseph's shy and quiet tendencies may cause him to wait for academic opportunities that are available to him. Here, for example, he says that he had friends in those classes, but that he "didn't really know how you got in there." It seems, too, that despite having peers in honors courses, his main friend group did not take advanced courses in middle school.

It's just mainly because like I never saw myself as someone who could take these advanced classes and stuff...It also didn't seem like the group of people that I was around were taking those types of classes. So that also influences you [be]cause you want to be around your friends and stuff and they're taking normal classes. You want to do that too.

Without adult intervention, as in the case of Carlos' parents and his AVID class, or a deeply ingrained desire like Angelica to challenge these more rigorous courses, Joseph simply



followed his peer group into standard classes despite having the ability to do more. Students like Joseph, who have the ability, but not necessarily the wherewithal to self-select or self-advocate for a different academic program, speak to the need for explicit invitation into these academically elite worlds. In that same line of discussion, Joseph makes more clear the lack of internal motivation that he and his friends had in middle school to push themselves into more advanced classes.

I feel like it's because we just didn't push ourselves to that point sometimes. And like my friends and stuff or like our group of people we just tend to be a little bit more - not like as uh, tempted to push ourselves there I guess you could say. Yeah. So like none of my friends really went to that [next] stage.

He is almost apologetic as he speaks. In retrospect, Joseph acknowledges that he and his friend group chose not to push themselves; and as a result, most of his friends who were not recruited into the QUEST program are “just taking like normal core classes.” While he takes responsibility for the role his own attitude and actions played in his failure to take the honors courses that were, in fact, available to him, I connect Angelica and Carlos’ perceptions of their middle school experience and cannot help but to reflect on what obligation the school holds in helping all of its young adolescents determine an academic program that will both challenge them and put them in the most favorable position for matriculation into high school.

It is not surprising that Joseph recognizes that his course placement in middle school did not prepare him for the academic rigor of high school honors or advanced placement courses. We discussed, however, a different aspect of middle school preparation that I had not heard from either Angelica or Carlos: the ability to interact with a diverse peer group in academic and social settings. In this first exchange, Joseph explains his perception of his middle school and how that experience influenced his initial entrée into high school.

*What middle school did you go to?*

[SMMS] so yeah.

*Keep going with that.*

So that school is like mainly, um, Hispanic and Latin. There's not many of other types of students there. It's really just mainly like a Latin Hispanic school. So that's like where I made all my friends and stuff.

*Do you think your attendance at [SMMS] affected how you navigate school now or what your expectations were when you came to SMHS?*

Uh, in a way. I mean, like here I was just back to always being around the Hispanic Latin kids. I've always just been around those type of kids and I always kinda hung around those like types of groups. And what I've seen from [SEMS] kids is that they like all stick together and it's like kind of divided. Um, not in like a bad way, but it's just like naturally divided that way. So yeah, I like navigated in a way of, um, like just trying to stay close to the people that I know and not really like meeting new people.

It is a reminder of the growing segregation of our schools, and Joseph's recognition of the divide among the students as they enter into high school is not uncommon. He feels his segregated environment limited his viewpoint and his motivation to push himself beyond what anyone else in his peer group was doing. He does, however, believe that enrollment in middle school honors classes can mitigate this effect.

My friends that were in honors classes in middle school, they were around like other groups of people. They were around like not just Hispanic and Latin kids because the honors classes in [SMMS], there's like a lot of diversity there and like the support classes are like all Hispanic so that's where I see the difference.

There are two things of note here. One, Joseph's assumption that the "support classes are like all Hispanic" corroborates the continued tracking of students in the middle school – even in a primarily Hispanic/Latinx setting, the traditional patterns of who enrolls in advanced coursework and who is relegated to "support" or remedial classes remain intact. Two, and more importantly for this study, the honors courses in the school are, in fact, diverse, and as such, they provide all students enrolled in them the opportunity to interact both socially and

academically with peers that are racially and culturally different. To Joseph, this means that those in SMMS honors courses matriculate into SMHS with an advantage; they are already used to the diversity that the large high school presents. They have already practiced and are more comfortable in class settings with diverse groups of students. I connect this to Carlos who readily embraces relationships with non-alike peers, Angelica, who while having some insecurity with her White classmates, differs from Joseph. Angelica's insecurity stems from her belief that her peers may position her lower because they stereotype her based on her perceived race or they have a negative perception of her because of her spotty attendance in class. Joseph, however, suggests he entered high school with a different problem. He did not know how to interact because he had no prior experience with extended academic relationships with White and/or privileged students. This would make his entry into the figured world of the academic elite even more difficult. And as we would discuss, the primary vehicle used by SMHS to support this transition may have, in fact, hindered him more.

*The role of school provided supports.* Like Carlos, Joseph has a mixed reaction to the supports provided by the QUEST program. He acknowledges that without QUEST, he likely would not have entered into honors or Advanced Placement courses in high school.

*Had you not been in QUEST, would you have taken AP and honors courses?*

Um, I dunno. Honestly, I don't think so. I think I would have kind of kept myself back and been like, I can only take, you know, regular normal classes. But QUEST definitely pushed me and like I'm taking APUSH this year again [be]cause I took [AP] World History last year. So yeah, I feel like without it I wouldn't be taking these classes.

Joseph states that he “never really saw myself as like someone who could take these advanced classes,” so the recruitment into QUEST influences both his belief in himself and

his academic trajectory. His enrollment leads him to take three Advanced Placement courses with plans to take a fourth, AP Government, in his senior year. The program, however, did have its drawbacks.

It was a benefit in the sense of like I was able to be around people that I knew. So the transition from middle school to high school was like really easy for me. But I feel like it also kinda held us all back a little bit because um, we just like were around everybody that we knew. So unless you had an elective or something, it was hard to get to know other people. And since QUEST was mainly like Hispanic and Latin, um, I never really got to meet any other types of different people in my first two years.

I am not surprised to hear this from Joseph, as Carlos had mentioned similar feelings about the program. It may have been even more significant for Joseph, though, as the cohort model extended the segregation he had experienced from middle school. In speaking specifically about his QUEST AP World class he states

I didn't get to experience like anything new. I didn't get anybody new in that class. It felt like a middle school class kinda too, because it was just people that I'd known for years now. So I didn't get anything new out of it other than like the things that they taught us. But in terms of like communicating with people and getting along and being able to work together and kind of giving each other that push to succeed, I didn't really get that (Interview 2).

*Do you feel like QUEST adequately that AP world class adequately prepared you for APUS?*

In some ways it did. But again, it was just the environment in there. It was really just like one type of one group of people in there. So I didn't get the experience of getting to communicate with new people and that's like something that's really important, especially in APUSH class. We do a lot of collaboration and it was with people that I knew, I never really got to understand how to or like learn how to be able to communicate with people that I'm not familiar with. I've learned a few things, but it didn't get me to where I think I needed to be.

Joseph's statement that the course "felt like a middle school class" takes me back to Angelica's story. She expressed dissatisfaction with her middle school history class because it didn't challenge her enough, a key complaint being the seemingly repetitive use of

“worksheets and the lack of the higher expectations from the teacher to push them further in their learning. I compare this to Joseph’s description of their AP World teacher.

[W]e liked her, um, the teacher, she was a great teacher, but I feel like she didn't push us hard enough. It was a lot of just like worksheets or notes and stuff. We weren't pushed to succeed. We were just pushed to get work done and turn it in and stuff. So I feel like she could have pushed us a lot more.

*And because of that you, that was one of the reasons you feel less prepared?*

Yeah. Um, it was just like worksheet after worksheet after worksheet. It wasn't getting to communicate as much. And also, like I said, there wasn't a lot of communicating with different people in there.

Though speaking of two different teachers and courses, Angelica and Joseph present a common theme among the participants as they discuss their needed supports. In order to feel prepared for future advanced coursework, students need more than complex content; how the teacher chooses to have students interact with that content is as important. Moreover, as illustrated in the case of Joseph, teachers and the larger system in general must introduce ways to explicitly prepare students, particularly students in homogenous settings, to converse, cooperate, and collaborate with diverse peers.

The pros and cons of the QUEST program were not the only supports that Joseph and I discussed. As the only student participant who entered high school without previous honors experience, his story and viewpoint was unique. During the focus group interview, the group discussed extensively about their thoughts on the supports nontraditional students needed and received in order to access and succeed in Advanced Placement courses. In the discussion, though, Joseph was much quieter than his peers. Several days later we held his second interview and he offered both an explanation and an opinion.

[L]ike that whole conversation really got me thinking. That was also like a big reason why I just kinda like sat and I was just thinking a lot of the time. I kinda didn't talk [be]cause I was like in my, my own, uh, mindset I guess you could

say. I really agree with especially with what [Kate] and [Evan] were saying about how some kids from other areas get more. We have the same opportunities, but it's that chance that you get to take that opportunity kind of thing. So like, just from my standpoint and like my experiences and stuff, I didn't get to have the tutors and stuff like that, that other students are getting to be able to succeed.

*So the opportunity to have the extras are not, are not there...tell me a little bit more about that. So you say you didn't have the opportunity for the tutoring and stuff. Why is that?*

It's just like economic or like just money problems with, uh, my family recently. Yeah. And it's just like things like that...Like kids from other areas are a lot luckier and they have the support from not just the school but like their community also to be pushed to succeed. And like what we were saying in the interviews that in, uh, in my middle school we didn't, we didn't really get that, that push that we needed. We got the opportunity to take those classes if you wanted to. But, uh, we didn't have the extra push to go there, so, yeah.

In their focus group the students made a distinction between schools offering the opportunity to enroll in honors and Advanced Placement courses and the ability of students to be able to take advantage of those opportunities. The types of supports offered by the school made a difference, and in Joseph's case, he found himself often unable to access the "extra" supports, such as out of class tutoring, that the school or his teachers offered. In discussed his situation further as the interview progressed.

It's just like your situation; not just in school because out of school there is like a lot of things that kind of hold me back from like being where I want to be. So yeah, that's like a hard thing to overcome because, um, also we were talking in the interview about how [Angelica] said that she kind of fell into the pressure of being the leader of her siblings and having to set an example for them. And having to take these classes, she felt like she had to do it. It wasn't a choice. I could also kind of agree with that [be]cause I kind of fell into the pressure of that.

*Are there things that the school could do to help mitigate that? Obviously they're not going to give you a baby sitter. But are there systems or policies or things that could happen that could even the playing field where you go, okay, yes, I have this stuff going on at home, but the school is doing this.*

Being a lot more flexible with the tutoring schedules because, personally I didn't get to go to a lot of the APUSH tutoring after school because I had

things to do after school. So I didn't get the opportunity to take a part in this tutoring. So I feel like just being a lot more flexible with that. Um, having more resources, like knowing that there's students in your school that don't have the opportunity to be here because they have other things to do. [T]hat [there are] things that are a little bit more important than going to tutoring. So yeah, just having a lot more access to things like this for, for minorities.

Joseph's home situation makes the tutoring opportunities unattainable. Knowing from my interviews with Angelica the ways Mr. Masters, the APUSH teacher, extends lessons and learning outside of classroom hours in the after school tutoring sessions, Joseph's inability to access these sessions is important. In his journal discussing his preparation for the APUSH national exam he discusses the opportunities provided by his teacher.

So with the AP test coming up obviously I had a decent preparation for it. I didn't get to do as much as I wanted to outside of class; it was mainly in class. I wish I had more time to do it outside of class, but there were just some things going on and it got in the way...Our teacher has a video library on Google Classroom so that really helped us to just kinda check out everything that happened throughout the year...I looked over the Google classroom a lot...I didn't get to do it as much as I wanted to, but I did do enough to where I felt pretty prepared for the test.

Joseph appreciates that his teacher provided an option beyond attendance at after school classroom sessions. The ability to access material at home provided needed flexibility, though he mentions that he did wish he had more time to access the videos. The need for various ways to access extended learning opportunities and for greater teacher flexibility was unsurprisingly important to Joseph.

I've also seen some students here that are struggling with their grades but also struggling with a lot of family problems and um, they have to have a job because they have to help their parents. So just knowing that there are students that need a lot more access to these things that, um, just because the teacher can only be here Mondays after school that shouldn't be it. I feel like there needs to be other people here, like they should hire a private tutor or something for the whole school and just have a lot more access. Like access is a big thing that we need because like I said, personally, I don't have the time or opportunity to be here all the time for tutoring. So yeah, just, knowing that

there's students that need a lot more help than what we're getting now is something big.

Talking to Joseph reminds me of the importance of each individual student's story.

His comments offer some insight into his 11th grade transcripts where he earned two Ds in his math and photography class, and had a C in AP US History in the first semester; while he raised his math grade to a C second semester he failed his photography class, a course that requires extensive work outside of the class period. For Joseph, schools and teachers should be taking their cues from their students on their needs; he discusses this near the end of our time together.

I feel like just getting to talk to the students, getting to not just like observe from above and just be like "okay"...you have to come and get to talk to the students and get to know like what's going on with them and their situation and what would benefit the most. I mean, I feel like if we had like tutoring on a Saturday, even though it sounds like kind of weird or something, I feel like it could help a lot of students...I can't speak for everyone because I don't know, but personally I feel like if I had someone come and talk to me and kind of get to know what's going on and get to know the times that would be most beneficial, I feel like that would definitely help because things just suddenly come up and you have no control over that.

What Joseph discusses here reminds me of an overarching question I had when hearing Angelica's comments about these types of support. She appreciated the extra help that tutoring offered, but, I noted, her schedule provided a flexibility (including a 6<sup>th</sup> period TA period) that allowed her to access the help. It seems, as with other aspects of AP programming, and APUSH specifically, that there is an unmet need for nontraditional and non-privileged students entering the system. As in the case of Joseph, he has been invited into the figured world by the school and some attempt has even been given to ease his transition into the world through the QUEST program. However, Joseph remains a neophyte within the world and requires additional help to fully succeed; the supports, offered, however,



are generalized and fail to meet his needs. The question then, it seems is, where the responsibility lies to mitigate this? With Joseph, whose personal circumstances limit his opportunity to access the supports as offered, or with the school who looks to support a broad range of students, not simply the few? Joseph's admonition for the educators in the school to actually speak to the students is deceptively simple. There is no clear indication of how the tutoring schedule was developed including how, if at all, the needs of the students were considered when creating the schedule.

Beyond, too, the broader supports that are offered by the school, Joseph and I discuss specific ways his teacher in APUSH and fellow students helped and hindered his engagement and achievement in class.

*Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.* As we talk about Joseph's interactions with his fellow students and his teacher in APUSH, I take time to hear his perspective on the racial/ethnic make-up of the class. In working with the participants, I find that this difference influences how the students perceive the class, their interactions within the class, and how they believe others perceive them. As noted in the earlier case studies, Angelica and Carlos had very different experiences, partially due to the diversity, or lack of, within their class. In our first interview, Joseph and I discuss his perceptions of the class composition.

*So what is the, what is your AP us history look like in terms of the makeup?  
Are you a minority in your class? Is it pretty diverse? What does it look like?*

Um, I mean, I guess you could say we're kind of in minority. There's only like five Hispanic kids in there compared to everyone else being different, uh, groups of people. So, yeah, I would consider ourselves a minority, but I don't feel like it's holding us back or anything. I feel like we're treated fairly.

The composition of the class is similar to Angelica's class, and like Angelica, Joseph initially states that does not believe that having so few nontraditional students in the class is "holding us back." Also, similar to Angelica's class, though, is a lack of integration among the students within the class.

The Hispanic kids we have like our own little corner in the class. We do like town halls in our classroom where we just walk around and get to know each other; but our group is just like always there in the little corner and we just like, we just talk amongst ourselves.

So unlike Carlos who, in his more diverse class, feels comfortable in interacting with others in the class, the Latinx students in Joseph's class, where they are a minority, are segregated in their "own little corner," and interestingly, when given the choice by the teacher to walk around the class and talk to other students, they choose to talk among themselves. Joseph, does note, however, that this is mitigated by Mr. Masters' actions to create more varied groups.

Our teacher generally, like he numbers us off and we just go like that. So it's always different. It's always diverse. We never really get to choose our own groups... We never really do big projects where we get to choose our own groups. He just kinda does it for us.

Joseph appreciates this aspect of the class; however, I discover that simply being placed in an integrated group does not mean that he, or his fellow students, integrate into the conversation.

*So how was your participation in those small groups and how was your treatment from others in those small groups?*

I tend to just kinda like stay back and like stay quiet because again, like I never got to know those people and stuff, so I just kind of, you know, not really talk as much, but I definitely do my work and once it's time to share our responses and stuff, I'm on that.

Harkening back to his feelings of being unprepared to interact with non-Latinx students and students who did not attend SMMS, Joseph's discomfort is evidenced in his lack

of participation. Delving deeper, though, his lack of participation may stem from more than just his own discomposure.

*So who does the talking in the small groups, would you say?*

It's mainly the kids that are like friends with one another and they've known each other for a while. I feel like it's kind of funny [be]cause like the kids tend to like connect to people that they can sort of relate to. Like I, um, since it's mainly like a White student centered group, I never really get like asked a question. Yeah. Normally they'd ask like the other White kid in our group. So yeah.

*And it's not like, it sounds like this is not on purpose.*

No, I feel like it's just like nature to them I guess. I feel like you just kind of want to connect to somebody that you know, so I feel like it's, I don't feel like it's like it's on purpose or anything.

Despite being placed in diverse groups; Joseph finds that he often remains on the outside of the group. As mentioned above, this is partially from his own actions, choosing not to participate. This choice, however, is grounded in what he believes to be student beliefs about him and their subsequent actions. In his second interview he says that “I didn’t, uh, talk to other students as much because sometimes like, you get a feeling that they kind of feel like you don’t know as much about the class and that stuff.” This perception leads him to participate less in his group, and is also a reason, he says, that the Latinx students choose to self-segregate and interact only with other.

*What made you think that other students didn’t think you knew as much?*

Um, just because we’re not the traditional AP students, we’re not the kids from [SEMS] and stuff like that, that are in those classes. So I think that’s why. It was also just because of like your color and your race and stuff. You’re not typically seen in those classes, so I feel like that was why I wasn’t really collaborating with them as much.

This explanation takes me back to Angelica’s insecurities, in which she felt other students had a belief about her because of her frequent absences. Joseph, though, also

connects this perception to race and his status as a nontraditional student. He feels he must often prove himself, and believes that other students treat him differently because of this status, and offers an example of why he feels this way in his second interview.

I guess your classmates, not necessarily the teachers, more of your classmates because when you're in group projects, um so like people don't typically talk to you if they feel like you'll be not as successful as them, then you have to prove yourself and show them that you are.

*Have you experienced that this year?*

Uh, yeah. When we were doing a group activity, me and one of my friends got put into a group with like some students that we didn't know before and um, they'd pass around these documents that we had to analyze and stuff. And like during the talk, um, they just kinda like went past us really quickly and they didn't really hear what we were saying. They were just like writing things down and ignoring us kind of. While everybody else was talking, they were like all paying attention and they were writing everything down and yeah, I like noticed that something was going on.

The actions of his White peers speak to a possible unconscious bias; as Joseph comments that he doesn't think the behavior is on purpose, but he "feel[s] like it's just like...nature to them." And, it would appear that the reflexive exclusionary practices within the APUSH class extended sometimes to teacher behaviors as well. Harkening back to Angelica's belief that in her class period a group of students were allowed to dominate whole group participation, Joseph mentions a similar pattern in his class. In the following exchange from his first interview, we discuss class participation.

*Do you think that your teacher treats everyone equally?*

Not really. Um, other students, uh, get called on like a lot more often and I don't think I had been called on in my history class like maybe like two times this whole year.

*Do you see that same pattern with the other, uh, Latin students in the class?*

Um, yeah, for sure. I definitely see that with other Latin students. We don't get called as often compared to the other students.

*So how does, how does class work in terms of [participation], do people raise their hand and they get called on or is it more the teacher will pick people or is it both?*

Oh, it's both. Sometimes we get to raise our hand and then other times he just like calls on us like, Oh, do you know the answer to this?

*Do you feel you participate? Do you raise your hand as much?*

Um, not often but like, yeah, if I know the answer to something, I raise my hand and stuff.

*Do you as a, as a group, would you say the five of you participate as much as the White students in class?*

Um, no. I see like a lot more coming from the White students in our class and like, our teacher just tends to like, always kind of pick the same students in the classroom. So yeah, we, I don't feel like our group is participating as much in terms of like raising our hands to answer and stuff.

Like both Angelica and Carlos, Joseph finds that seemingly innocuous decisions on the part of the teacher can hinder nontraditional students from becoming full-fledged members of the class. He tells what came to be a familiar account among the study participants about seating arrangements in the classroom.

[I]'m not sure if it was the beginning of this semester or the end of the first semester, but, we were basically told, oh, you can sit wherever you want for the rest of the year. It's going to be the seating chart for the rest of the year. I feel like that definitely kind of kept us in our corner because it was pick your seat and you just want to be around the people that you know. So I feel like you should randomize it more. Like personally I feel like that way I would've been able to communicate with other students in there and be able to show that I'm not just here to take the class, like I know what's going on and stuff. So I feel like definitely...putting students together that aren't the same would definitely help.

As he continues, he places some ownership on students in the class as well.

Stepping out of your comfort zone, I guess that would help a lot because...it's been the whole year and it's the [same] group of student that know each other. They, they're like over here and then the Mexican kids are over here. It's like instead of just being balled up in like one spot and one spot, I feel like collaborating a lot more and getting to talk to each other and getting to know each other would help because like, even now, I still don't know a lot of the students in there. I don't know their names and stuff.

*So at the end of the year, and there's still some you don't know?*

Yeah. Like it's not just that class too. It's like all my classes. I'm just typically around people I know because that's how I feel comfortable.

He gives a specific message to those students of privilege whom he feels have excluded him from group discussions and, have, to an extent, relegated him and his fellow Latinx classmates to the outskirts of the class.

*You talked about that it feels like there are those in the class who think that they are smarter or think that you are not as academically prepared. What would you say to those types of people?*

So like just give you a fair chance, you know, just get to talk to the [different] races and get to know the person. You know, I'm personally like I'm quiet in that class, but it's not [be]cause I don't know anything. It's not because I don't know what's going on. I just that's just typically how I am and how I feel like I'm successful in that class by just staying quiet and learning. I feel like just giving other people a fair chance to prove that they know what's going on in there, to prove that they're prepared for that class, to prove that they're willing to put in the same amount of work in there. So yeah, just giving them a chance.

This comment by Joseph, sharing both a need to be accepted by the traditional students in the class and a need to prove himself as an equal member of the group speaks directly to how he has been positioned in the class – the figured world of APUSH. We speak extensively of his struggle with his academic identity coming into the academically elite world and his ongoing negotiation of identity as he navigated the APUSH world specifically.

*Academic and personal identity in the figured world.* Joseph's personal and student identity are, unsurprisingly, closely tied. His race, his culture, and his class blend with his actual and perceived pre-high school experiences to inform his beliefs and actions as a student in Advanced Placement generally and APUSH specifically. In his first journal he offers a glimpse into how he believes the traditional students in APUSH perceive him as a student.

I don't feel like there's a huge amount of stereotypes and assumptions that I personally face in my classroom, but one of them that I definitely do face is the assumption that, um, me being a Hispanic student, I won't put in as much effort

or work into the classroom. But just being in my particular period, um, I feel like it's that way because typically Hispanic students aren't found in those classrooms. Like for example, in my period there's only like five or six of us and we typically just kind of hang around each other. I feel like it's because Hispanic students are typically found in the normal history classes. I feel like it's a little out of the ordinary for Hispanic students to be in there, especially in the US History class. And just based off that one assumption, I feel like it really does negatively impact Hispanic students. I feel it kind of forces us to have to go the extra mile to prove to, not necessarily the teachers, but the other students, that we're willing to put in the same effort and work as them.

Joseph's belief that he has to actively work against stereotypes is also seen with Carlos, though how the two manage and manifest this within their classes differed. I imagine this is due, at least partly, to their differences in personality - Carlos being more outgoing and Joseph being a self-proclaimed introvert. Joseph, though, does indicate that he feels a pressure to shift his behavior in order to gain the respect of his peers in class. He gives an example in the same journal entry.

What I try to do to prove a point that we put in the same effort is, um, in group activities I try to be a little bit more talkative and more active and more, um, cooperative, I guess you could say. Not really cooperative, but, um, I just try to get communicating with the other students as much as I can and I try to get my work done faster. Still to the best of my ability, but just a little faster because I feel like if you're like the last person writing and everybody else is waiting on you, I feel like they kind of feel that you don't know what you're doing. So I feel like it's just extra pressure to have to prove a point and be a little quicker in your classes and have to be communicating a lot more than they would with their friends and stuff...[W]e have to go the extra mile and have to put in a little bit more effort and more work than the other students just because of the simple fact that we Hispanic students are outnumbered in these classrooms. So it's a little bit harder to stand out and get the other students to realize that you're also putting in the same amount of effort.

In reviewing this entry, I recognize another example of Joseph's outsider status in the figured world. He feels the need to prove that he belongs in the class, even rushing through work to ensure that he is not the last to finish, concerned that his White and/or privileged peers - those established insiders of the world - would assume that, as he puts it, he doesn't

know what he's doing. Recognizing that he holds little "symbolic capital" (Holland et. al, 1998 pp 128-129) within this world - he is Latinx, he did not attend SEMS, he was not enrolled in honors classes in middle school, his 9th and 10th grade honors/AP courses were separated from the larger student body - Joseph continually works to establish and maintain his position. Giroux (2003) notes that participants in figured worlds of education are measured, ranked, and labeled by such details as knowledge level, language, and behaviors. Joseph is acutely aware that his actions matter, both in how he is viewed and how he is treated by his privileged peers.

As much, however, as Joseph may be concerned with how he is perceived - or positioned - in this figured world of APUSH by his peers, his own self-belief as a student plays a role in his positioning in the AP course. In our first interview he recalls his own biases related to traditional AP students.

*When you came in to ninth and 10th grade, when you thought about AP students, what came to your mind? What were those students like?*

It was kinda like stereotypical, like the White student who has like, they have it all and they have everything under control and they have really good grades and they have everything. I never really got the uh, the image of another Hispanic student. Um, yeah. It wasn't like on purpose, it's just kind of like (trails off)

*It's just what you -*

That's what I see generally too. Like in the Student Union too, when you see like those posters of the students and stuff you kind of get that image.

*They all look the same*

Yeah.

Here Joseph speaks specifically of a student ambassador program the school has which features students with the top GPAs in the school. In addition to being academic ambassadors to feeder middle school students, serving as representatives and inspirations of the highest



academic excellence within the high school, these students have a school sponsored professional photo shoot and their pictures are placed prominently in the Student Union, a highly trafficked area of the school. A perusal of these photos would reveal a relatively singular view of academic excellence, namely, that White and Asian students are the sole carriers of this distinction. It is not unreasonable to believe that this program and these students who served as ambassadors to the middle schools unconsciously sent a message to those 6th, 7th, and 8th graders with whom they addressed during their visits. Without seeing a representation of himself as a someone who could hold top grades in the school, Joseph did not place himself as one who could be part of the academic elite. Even during the study, after participating in the QUEST program, and nearly completing APUSH as an 11th grader, Joseph's belief in his place within the world of AP is not secure.

I don't see myself as a typical AP student. I just started taking these types of classes last year. So I feel like I'm like pretty new to all this stuff and I kinda felt like all the other students were way more advanced and stuff and they kind of knew what they were getting themselves into.

This bit of self-doubt that creeps in when Joseph talks about himself as an AP student is reminiscent of the insecurities that Angelica revealed about the ways she believed her classmates viewed her. In our second interview, Joseph states that his AP classmates “just typically feel like we're not the smart kids in these types of classes. So like we're kind of seen as dumb or something.” As a result, despite journal and interview comments that indicated a need to prove himself through his actions, Joseph found himself actually participating less in his APUSH class.

Personally I feel like I participated less because I'm just getting that idea that everyone else thinks that you're not going to be as successful and stuff. You want to push yourself, but you also get a little bit discouraged and you just kinda want to stay quiet and just be in your own zone.

I note, too, that even when Joseph remarks positively about his academics, he harkens back to uncertainties related to his positioning in the class. In a later journal he writes

Academically I don't feel like I'm very far behind my other classmates. I don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage or anything because of my culture and things like that. I feel like anybody in that classroom, if you really try can be successful and you don't have to have prior knowledge to the class. But yeah, um, there have been times where I feel like some other students felt like, um, just because of my culture and stuff that I haven't been academically the same as them. I feel like maybe they think that, um, I'm a little less smart than them because of that.

The self-doubt is connected to his perception of how is viewed by his peers in the APUSH class; and it appears to have dogged him throughout the year, as it is a recurring topic throughout my time with him. There are times when he perceives that he is placed in a lower position, times when he places himself in a lower position, and times, it appears, that he is, in fact, positioned lower by his White and/or privileged peers, his teacher, and even the curriculum, all of which ultimately influenced his behavior in class.

*The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.* Joseph's quietness in class can be attributed to many factors as noted above. There is yet another piece to the story of his navigation of APUSH that has yet to be told. It is a tale of sidelines and margins, of perceived omissions and silences that is inextricably linked to Joseph's view of the class, his feeling of belonging, and his engagement within the course. The belief that the textbook and curriculum is inadequate, at best, wholly Eurocentric and elitist at best, is a refrain that each participant in some way describes. Joseph is no different in his belief that the curriculum offers little for Latinx students to connect to; and offers the common view among the students that the curriculum and the instruction is rife with missed opportunities to offer a broader story of the role people of color played in the history of the U.S. For his part, Joseph offers a clear picture of his thoughts about the curriculum.

[T]he whole year we haven't really talked about any other groups except White Americans or like White Americans going to war against this group or this group. I feel like they should include a lot more of the groups because America's like obviously a whole bunch of groups, just not White Americans. I feel like if that aspect of U.S. History was brought to the classroom, I feel like I'd feel way more connected with the class. Because right now I don't feel like I'm connecting with it. I feel like it's just like a class that I'm taking.

*Interesting...your feeling is that it is a limited view of US history?*

Yeah, because like my particular race, we've only discussed it like twice this whole year and it was like a five-minute thing and now you're just like done.

As the exchange in this initial interview continues, we discuss the difference in his connection to APUSH and AP World curriculum.

*Did you feel differently taking AP World than you do with APUS?*

Well, um, in a way I felt a lot more into the class. I felt more involved in it because we were going over a lot more groups not just like White Americans. We were going through like tons of different people, so I felt way more involved there.

*Did you, do you hear any other, do you hear about other groups other than White Americans (in your APUSH class)?*

Yeah, no, they never really come up. It's just like always like White Americans, White Americans, White Americans, like little bit of Black people and their life. Yeah. It's like that. I never really get to hear the story of other groups of people. I feel like it's just a class all about learning about White people.

Like Carlos and Angelica, Joseph finds that the text offers a near exclusive narrative of the history of White America, with the experiences of people of color presented only in relation to this group. In our second interview we talk more about his perception of the APUSH narrative of American history.

*Did AP US History tell in your opinion the full story of the US?*

Um, no, I don't think so. It was mainly just, uh, White America's. Like this president and this president or these groups of people see these groups of people. Um, we didn't learn a lot about, you know, me being, um, a Hispanic student, we didn't really learn anything about that type of stuff. I wish we did because it's just something that this country was kind of built by immigrants

and stuff. You think you would have learned a lot about different groups of people, but it was mainly just White Americans.

*Do you think if the content were different your level of participation and confidence would have been different?*

Yeah, for sure. I would've felt a lot more connected with everything that was going on in the class because, um, we didn't, like I said, we didn't talk about a lot of different types of races and stuff. So I feel like if it was more about the people that I know and like my ancestors and stuff, I feel like I would've participated a lot more and been more involved in stuff.

*Now that you've gone through really the full content of AP US how would you define the history of the US as it was presented in class in terms of what are the important things in us history?*

The important things – I feel it was that Americans or the colonists came from England. They got here, they built the colonies, and they had the slaves, and it was just a lot of White America stuff like moving forward. It was White Americans doing this, White Americans building this, White Americans fighting this. It wasn't a lot of other people being involved.

Joseph's perception of what is foregrounded in the curriculum is not uncommon. As Carlos also mentioned, people of color were discussed only in relation to their interaction with White Europeans, not as individual contributors on their own. I certainly understand the sentiment, and also wonder if the expectation of the curriculum is reasonable. Are White Europeans foregrounded in the curriculum because it is their actions of dominance and subjugation of peoples that formed the country? Similarly, I wonder if the US History curriculum can and even should be separated from this Eurocentric viewpoint, for it can be argued that it is this very subjugation and domination that was integral to the birth and rise of the nation.

As a student of color, learning and interacting with this checkered history can be tricky at best and emotionally violent at its worst (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010). Generally, Joseph feels that his teacher handles the content, well, though he does recognize moments of

discomfort within the class during times of racially/culturally sensitive topics. We begin to discuss his perceptions during our first interview.

*So think about times when there has been racially or culturally sensitive, curriculum that has been presented. In APUSH you're talking about the birth of the nation, right? So, you know, you talk about slavery, you talk about*

*Natives...*

*Yes. Christopher Columbus discovering America. So when you have those times of sensitive material, how has the class reacted to that?*

I dunno. I feel like when we finally started talking about these things, a lot of our classmates and stuff, they started to realize like some of the horrible stuff that went throughout history. They just kinda like when they were little, they heard about Christopher Columbus. He like explored and discovered America, but now they realize that they were like killing natives and stuff. So they're like really shocked to hear all this because they had the idea that all American history was like great and stuff and it was all like very wonderful I guess.

I sense from Joseph his appreciation both of the acknowledgement within the curriculum of the barbarism perpetrated and of the revelations his peers had regarding some aspects of the history of the country. We continue to discuss how these topics were handled by the teacher.

*How did the teacher handle that type of sensitive curriculum? Was there anything that he mentioned about, you know, this might be sensitive or did he do any of that or was it just presented as this is what is in the textbook here's what we do?*

Um, no, our teacher like lets us know beforehand. Um, when there's like very sensitive topics, like today we talked about World War Two and the atomic bomb. So he let us step out if we really needed to. But other than that he was really honest with what really happened. And he didn't give us like any, uh, false ideas or anything. It was all like straight up how it was.

*How did, how did the White students react to this type of this information? Do they seem like, oh, we didn't know this was bad? Or did you get any other sense of how they felt about it or, or their comments?*

Um, yeah, I definitely heard a lot of students; like they were kind of shocked about hearing all this type of stuff. But um, I heard a little bit of laughing too, just like due to the way that other groups are treated. Um, yeah. It wasn't like –

it was just me kind of shocked that they realized that the history was like kind of graphic, I guess.

*Do you think the kids internalize anything about the curriculum...they didn't realize the bad treatment? Do you think that has an effect on them as they move forward?*

Um, no, not really. I feel like nothing's really changed. You just kind of learn about how things were and they just kind of take it as that and just keep moving on. Like now we're talking about more mistreatment with the bombs and stuff that like killed people. So yeah, nothing really changed. I mean I had like one kid in my class talk about how like the bombing was, um, it was like the right thing to do and like the Japanese people had it coming [be]cause they like harmed us and stuff. So yeah, it kinda like shocked me a little bit [be]because I was like, I'm not, I don't feel like it's right to do that.

When Joseph mentions student reactions to learning about some of the atrocities perpetrated within U.S. History, it sparks a curiosity regarding students' ability to sympathize with different groups. What reaction would the presentation of these events – and their brutal reality – trigger among students, if any? Would that in turn influence the behavior of peers within the class? In the case of Joseph's class, it appears that while the content may have been eye-opening to some, it's effects did not extend beyond the surface level. Students, he mentions, simply take it in and "keep moving on." Part of this may be in the presentation of the material; Joseph mentions that in his class, as has been noted before from participants in different class periods, students have very little interaction with each other during these times of sensitive curriculum. Lectures and independent work, including essays and notes, are the primary vehicle for information; with teacher directed whole group discussion being the extent to student to student interaction. As has been remarked by other participants, the lack of group discussion does not allow for students to engage and learn from different perspectives at any in-depth level.

I don't really feel like we had a lot of opportunity to talk about our experiences and things like that. For me personally I felt like it was, it was just the history

and just moving forward and not really getting to share like your experience with that.

In our second interview to gain more information about the presentation of specific topics related to race, I ask about the presentation of the civil rights movements in the U.S.

Joseph notes that the section is a brief moment within the overall curriculum.

*How did your curriculum or your teacher present civil rights movements that happened?*

Um, it was really brief. It was like the whole civil rights thing. It took us like maybe a week or two to talk about. It was just like presented as these groups of people were tired of being minorities and they started to stand up for themselves and try to improve their quality of life here in America because it was their home too. But it was very brief. We were just taught, oh, they did this, they did this. And then we moved on from that.

*When you say it was brief, brief in comparison to give me another example from the content that you will say, oh, we went into real depth about this, but we only did this briefly.*

Um, the colonies were something we definitely, I felt like we talked way too much about. It was getting to the point where it's getting really boring. Um, the civil war, I feel like we talked a lot about that compared to the civil rights movement, which I feel like personally is a little bit more important because it's like minority groups rising up and being able to change the way that they're treated, how they've been treated throughout history. So I feel like other topics that were like the colonization, um, I feel like it was talked about way too much.

While Joseph's response is somewhat comical – just how long can one discuss the colonies – it also offers another glimpse into why Joseph feels disconnected from the curriculum. Having neither the opportunity to spend time on parts of the curriculum that he feels are “a little bit more important” and relevant to himself, and spending what he views as an inordinate amount of time on the early colonization of America, Joseph has little to engage with or connect to in the APUSH curriculum as it is presented in his class. In his journal he

does mention his appreciation of those activities that do allow for greater exploration of the history of people of color.

Chapter 28 of our textbook discusses the civil rights movement and I did learn some new stuff from this part of the curriculum. I learned a lot about people of color in the country and how the conditions for them were at the time. You got to learn about how they tried to speak out for themselves and improve their quality of life in America. You know, just not, not make it be White America, they really pioneered and pushed people to step up for themselves and make a change in the country and not listen to what the norms of the times oriented [sic]...and really make change and just like bring us to where we are now...I learned about all the different groups like the Black Panther Party and the Chicano movement and the Zoot Suit riots and stuff like that that I hadn't really discussed about prior to this part of the book or like anytime really in the entire time that I've been in school...We got to do a little meet and greet type of thing where you would choose a civil rights leader and you would get to research them for a few days and get to know who that person was...It was really cool [be]cause you got to meet a lot of different civil rights leaders and not just Chicanos but like African Americans and Native Americans and Asians and like all types of different people...

So that was like kind of all we did for that and we had to rush through it because the AP exam was coming up so we had to hurry up and get through that, unfortunately. I wish we'd talked about that a little more. The class during this short period, um, I felt like a lot more people participated, a lot more people it feels like were interested in the classroom just because of the fact that you weren't just talking about your typical American, you were talking about all types of different people and all the different people in the class were able to connect with the lessons a lot more. They were more interested, they wanted to find out more, and they knew the answers to a lot more things and they felt confident to speak up about it...

I felt like it was presented really well, it just was, sadly, like rushed, just due to timing. There were like a few connections to what happened during the time to current events just because like all of what's going on with, um, obviously the president and just the Hispanic culture and how it's reacting to some of his words and actions...I noticed at the time how Hispanics felt sort of discriminated and even now how they still feel discriminated against.

This excerpt offers a few significant insights. From his introductory comments, I note his appreciation for those in the civil rights era who fought against societal norms to make it not just be about "White America" and to "bring us where we are now." I believe his interest



is greater than simply admiration for these historical figures, but rather they served as inspiration and even aspiration for Joseph and his fellow Latinx students in class. His later comments noting that this era connected to current events would seem to validate this idea as Joseph makes note that Hispanics still feel discriminated against today.

I recognize, too, that the “meet and greet” activity is the same one discussed by Angelica; and Joseph, like her, values the opportunity to take on the role of a Chicano civil rights leader. Moreover, he found that “it was really cool” to be able to learn about “all different people,” offering everyone in the class the ability to interact with a variety of strong leaders of color. Most notably, Joseph mentions that “a lot more people” were interested and participating in class. He believes this to be related to the content and I would suggest also the format of the assignment. All students had the opportunity to interact and engage with each other, while students of color in particular found historical figures and events that connected to their race and culture – it is content and curriculum in which they see these figures not in positions of subjugation, but rather, as Joseph notes, “pushing against” societal norms to instigate change.

As Joseph notes, the instances within the curriculum where students of color see themselves represented are limited, and particularly so for moments in which these figures are not portrayed as objects to be dominated, controlled, or victimized by White and privileged men. I find his fourth journal to be particularly poignant and a fitting summation of his feelings about the APUSH curriculum.

I felt like my background and culture wasn't really talked about at all in the textbook. And it still like stands true that at the end of the textbook we didn't really talk about Latin and Hispanic people. The main source where I get all my history from this stuff is my, um, family members like my grandparents...I don't really get it from anywhere in, in classes and stuff...[L]earning about

your history is really important because it's who you are and, and how you got to where you are and well, what was the reason for why you are the way you are...I feel like it's just really important to know where you come from and to know what your ancestors represented. And what they built...

[I]n the history classroom right now, we don't really get to learn a lot about ourselves and find out who we are as people. We just kind of learned about this whole American dream concept about how the colonists came here and they built America and then that's what Americans now are a result of. But that's not really true for a lot of people living here because not everybody's someone that came from the colonists. It's just, um, it's not fair in a way because you don't get to know how you were here. You get to learn about how, you know, the colonists were here and how they built all this, but you never really get to learn how you were here. You kind of, I personally kind of feel like you're just like, by the end of the class you're like, "Okay, cool. We learned all about this stuff. But what about me?" You still have like some questions about how did I get here, why am I here?

#### **Case Study Four: Kate**

There is a popular photograph of a young Frida Kahlo circa the 1920s taken by her father. In it her midnight hair is loosely pulled back; dark, almond eyes stare intently at the camera; and her expression, if not categorically humorless, is noticeably serious. It is a countenance aged beyond her years, more grave than one would perhaps expect from someone so young. And it is the image that is triggered in my mind upon my first meeting of Kate. The two undoubtedly share physical features that reveal a common Oaxacan lineage, but even more so does my mind connect them to a seemingly mutual earnestness of spirit, an intensity of interacting with the world that is further revealed as I come to know Kate.

I meet Kate for the first time as part of this study, although, she, like most of the study participants, is an alumna of SMMS. She and Joseph are friends and are the only two participants who share the same APUSH teacher and period. Kate serves as interesting contrast to Joseph in personality, and as such offers a unique perspective on the class and experience that they share.

An initial review of Kate's middle school report cards and high school transcript shows a relative consistency within her performance in secondary school. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade she earned As and Bs, ending first and second semester with a 3.43 and 3.57, respectively. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade she attempted her first honors class, Honors World History. She did well in it, but struggled in math 1<sup>st</sup> semester, finishing with a D-; she bounced back second semester, however, earning all Bs and an A in Language Arts, giving her a 3.17 GPA. She chose both honors Language Arts and History in 8<sup>th</sup> grade; as I will learn in a later interview, she did not find the honors history class to be challenging, as is bore out in her A grades both semesters. She earned a C in Honors Language Arts first semester and had an overall 3.17 GPA; in

second semester she improved her Language Arts grade and raised her GPA to 3.5. This pattern, As and Bs, with an occasional first semester C, continued in her first two years of high school. Ninth grade saw a 3.71 and 3.5 GPA first and second semester, while tenth grade had a first semester C in Geometry leading to a 3.29 GPA. Kate once again, however, improved second semester, raising her C in Geometry to a B, and her overall GPA to a 3.57 by the end of the year. It is notable that in 10<sup>th</sup> grade Kate enrolled in AVID for the first time, offering an additional support along with the QUEST cohort of which she was already a part.

As with all of the participants, this paper review, while offering some background on Kate's performance in secondary school, hardly gives us whole view of her. Moreover, Kate, more so than any of the other students I worked with, took time to open up and offer more than simply answers she thought I wanted to hear, or more accurately, answers she thought she should give. After our first interview, in fact, I found myself worried about her as a participant. I memoed:

At the end of this interview and I am confused. [Kate] seems to have such a drastically different view than the other participants. Pollyannaish – everything is great. Her affect, too, is quite dry. I don't know if I would say she is stand offish, but I wonder how sincere she is being. She clearly wants to protect her school and her teachers. I don't know yet if I believe what she is saying; I don't think I have her trust.

Time and the group interview allowed Kate to open up. I noted that her answers became more personal, sincere even, during the group interview as other students shared their stories and perceptions. Their vulnerability allowed her to become more vulnerable herself; and this became a turning point in my interactions with her.

Kate is no nonsense and self-sufficient. Her approach to school, if not calculating – which may conjure an unfair negative connotation – is certainly careful and considered. She is scholarly and driven with clear goals for her future. She is one of 16 students – eight girls

and eight boys – who applied for (completing an extensive application, writing an essay, and undergoing a panel interview) and received an ongoing scholarship in her tenth grade year.

She describes herself this way

A lot of my friends actually sometimes like they tease me, call me the scholar of the group because of the scholarship I have. They always like tell me if I want to go out and I'm just like, no, I have to study for this or I have to do this, it's due tomorrow and I need to put some finishing touches and they're like oh, I forgot you're a scholar. So I feel like my friends view me like that.

I come to learn that Kate's drive is partially inherent, she seems innately more serious than her peers; though she notes that she has fun as well, "you can have fun and be a scholar at the same time" (Journal 10). There is also a sense of responsibility and urgency that Kate has to succeed in school that is beyond her own internal motivation. In the focus group and her subsequent interview, she refers to her single working mother and her two siblings living in Mexico, neither of whom completed high school. She feels a pressure to succeed, and as such, has mapped out a course to ensure her successful completion of high school and entrance into college. In the months I spend with Kate, she slowly reveals herself – our time together is the quintessential peeling of the metaphorical onion – and I come to understand that her composed and controlled demeanor and responses are as sincere as any intimate revelations that she or her fellow participants offer. In fact, her approach to her schooling, and even this study, is revelatory in how she handles being a nontraditional student in her honors/AP courses, and broadly how she manages her racial, cultural, and socio-economic status in a predominately privileged world.

*Middle school expectations and preparation.* Kate's perception of her experience at SMMS mirrors that of her fellow study participants. During the focus group, the students discussed their beliefs regarding the extent to which their middle schools encouraged them to

take honors courses during their time there, and also prepared them for honors/AP courses in high school. An exchange between Kate and Evan offers a glimpse into her viewpoint.

Evan: [F]rom what I've heard...like they (students from SMMS) weren't really being pushed to excel as much as they were just being pushed to finish.

Kate: Yeah, the honors classes at SMMS weren't – the teachers didn't stress for you to take them. Like I think if it was up to them, they didn't really care because regardless they got paid.

Kate's matter-of-fact rhetoric regarding her SMMS teachers is startling to hear. Her statement that the teachers "didn't really care" because they were going to be paid regardless seems like an overly harsh indictment. Yet, it is a comment that fits her no-nonsense disposition, and I wonder if its intent is as incriminatory as it comes across. She continues

But like when you want to take an honors class in eighth grade, like when I took my honors class, I had to go up to my teacher and get a paper at the office and I had to ask around because I didn't know...

When you compare it to like your high school and they don't even let you drop out of that AP class anymore because they think you can take them. It just, it depends on you, whether you motivate yourself enough.

Kate recognizes that the processes, and also the teachers, in her middle school did little to encourage students to take honors courses. In fact, she makes the stark comparison between a perceived middle school experience in which students receive no encouragement, and must actually request and be allowed to enter the realm of honors, and the high school experience in which students must request and are often denied exit from Advanced Placement. True to her nature, though, Kate seems to ultimately put the ownership on the student to navigate the system.

She does note, too, that her middle school honors courses offered little preparation for the rigors that she would face in high school. She notes, "I feel the honors classes [and] the normal classes were in a way similar. The teachers didn't really challenge us as much. They

provided us like some basic skills.” That sentiment was reiterated in her focus group comments about her middle school history classes, “I had the same history teacher like for two years and it was really like the same curriculum and I was in honors.” In contrast, she mentions her 8<sup>th</sup> grade Honors Language Arts teacher as the only one who was realistic about what they would face in high school. In the focus group she stated, “I think the only...teacher in middle school that prepared me for high school was Mr. [Hernandez]. He was really like ‘This is not as it is in high school’ and he wasn’t wrong.” She adds the he “was the only teacher that really like taught me something...[he] kind of like scared me and pushed us a lot.” Mr. Hernandez had been an English teacher at SMHS before moving to the middle school. I worked with him in both schools; during our time together at SMMS, we often discussed his perception and frustration that his 8<sup>th</sup> grade students – particularly his Latinx students – would not be “ready” for the environment of SMHS where they would come together with students from SEMS. As a Hispanic male with two sons of his own, he expressed his own frustration at the low expectations he perceived other teachers at the school had for students of color and/or from low socio-economic backgrounds. He was outspoken in these beliefs with his colleagues, and equally so with his students. Kate’s comment that he “scared me” was not an uncommon feeling for students, but like, Kate, most students appreciated both his honesty and toughness. This appreciation and acknowledgement by students of the need to pushed by their teachers is the same argument presented by Carlos and Joseph about their AP World teacher, and Angelica and Kate about their 8<sup>th</sup> grade Honors History teachers. The long-term benefits of being challenged in class outweighed the possible short-term difficulties of learning to navigate a tough teacher or class. For the students of SMMS, it appears that while challenge may have been welcome, it was not often given.

In a final note about middle school preparation and expectation, Kate offers an unexpected viewpoint about the perceived differences in preparation between SEMS and SMMS students. The following exchange is part of the participant focus group in which the students discuss each school's stereotypes about the other.

Angelica: I think what you said about how we view the schools is important because I guess you can say that there was like this thing about —

Evan: Stigma

Angelica: Yeah. Like, I don't know, there was competition or whatever. And [SMMS] was like looked down upon because of its physical, you know —

Kate: Appearance?

Angelica: Yeah. I think that kind of has to do with how it connects to equal opportunity. Like we were just looked down upon. I kind of see that...

Kate: We heard [SEMS], it's like...the rich school...That's the only way we saw it.

Carlos: Like a bunch of White kids.

Kate: I feel like we didn't like them because how we thought they had all this money.

Angelica: Like more sophisticated.

Kate: And how like they had an advantage because they were more privileged than us. But then at the same time when I look back at it, it's like if they did kind of have that privilege, I'm glad I didn't have it because I worked twice as hard for what I have now.

Within this exchange the students acknowledge perceived stereotypes that individuals within each school had about each other, accepting that they felt they were looked down upon. Interestingly, Kate notes that even if the students at SEMS had an advantage because of their privilege, she appreciates that she worked "twice as hard" for what she has now. She has taken what her fellow participants felt was a disadvantage and framed it as a personal



advantage. It again speaks to her innate belief that it is ultimately her actions – the classes she enrolls in, the work she chooses to put in, the supports she chooses to take advantage of – that will determine her secondary and post-secondary trajectory. It makes sense, then, that she readily took advantage of the supports, including the QUEST program, as she transitioned into SMHS.

*The role of school provided supports.* My understanding of Kate blossomed during the focus group interview. The revelations I learn clarify her self-sufficiency, her drive, even her somewhat cool demeanor. They reveal a student in critical need of support to successfully navigate the world of high school honors/AP; but, perhaps more urgently, I realize that, for Kate, these school provided supports effectively serve *in loco parentis*, offering the guidance and aid that her working mother is unable to provide. In the focus group discussion Kate reveals the pressure she feels from her situation.

For me, my siblings didn't go to high school, so I'd say my mom's like, "You have to be the one who graduates. You have to get ahead, do what we didn't do." And then my siblings, I talk to them all the time, are like "You're smart, you can do this" and all that stuff. And then it applies like more pressure on me. I'm just like, can I really do this?

While Kate is encouraged by her mother and siblings to "do what we didn't do," there is little support that they can offer her for her schooling. She continues

I think it's harder when you're from a lower income. If you're a single parent; like my mom goes to work all the time. Like my mom's never home. She comes home at eight at night and then she comes home; she eats, she showers, and she sleeps. So we don't really have much time to talk. That's like only on Sundays. So when it comes to like resources, I have to find them on my own because obviously my mom doesn't know. And it's sometimes, it's hard to [even] like be at school, [be]cause like in a car it's five minutes away, but walking, we walk like 50 minutes every day.

Throughout the study Kate asserts that she and all students have equal opportunities to succeed in honors/AP courses. As we work to uncover her layers, however, she does

acknowledge the navigation of the world of the academically elite is more difficult for some, herself included, than others. In our second interview we discuss this.

I still think we all do have opportunities. Just a lot of us have to take different steps to get to those opportunities. Especially like nontraditional students; we all have different obstacles. Unlike other kids who have those opportunities offered to them faster and easier, nontraditional kids have to take more steps and more obstacles. And a lot of the times some of them get stuck and tend not to take the opportunities because it's too much work to get there.

*So I'm interested you say, um, that other students have, are able to take the opportunities faster. It's faster and easier. What do you mean by that?*

Um, I mostly direct it to kids who are like White and have their parents and all that. Like having both their parents to have...a stable family most of the time. And they have more stable income and all these things. So for a lot of the times they can buy their way in or like they just get everything handed to them unlike other kids. Like in my case I don't, my mom's like always working and so I always have to figure things out for myself or I have to call this person, ask this person because I don't know what to do or I'm confused and like lost and I have to get help on certain things so I can take the opportunities that are being offered to me.

*How does, how do you think, um, your mom having to work a lot? How does that impact your schooling?*

I feel like it impacts my schooling because a lot of the times when there're things that are related to school, she can't attend sometimes. Like a lot of the parent nights or parents' college nights, she can never attend those because she has to work. And especially since she doesn't drive, it's harder for her to get to her work, which is in (city name removed) all the way back to [SMHS]. The last time she attended a school related event was when I was admitted into the National Honor Society and it was even harder for her to get to [here]. We don't like own credit cards or anything either, so she can't like just Uber herself or anything. So she had to take the bus and take the bus. She had to get out of work like an hour prior and all these things. So sometimes it is like upsetting for me not to have my mom present for school related things unlike other kids who have their moms or their parents and they're like, they're supporting them. I know my mom supports me, but it's hard sometimes when she's not able to physically be there.

Kate has a definite sense that there are those around her whose school life is easier than hers. She equates those of privilege as “White (students) with stable families”, a contrast

to the world in which she lives. While she knows that her mother supports her schooling – even noting earlier that she feels added pressure from her mother to succeed – she also finds herself forced to chart this world alone. Her mother’s long hours and lack of transportation make it difficult for her to attend events held at the school and to access information that may be given at the school. As such, Kate finds herself on her own, having a “call this person and that person” when she is confused and, as she states, to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered. It is a situation that pulls Kate in equally important directions – home and school. Her situation, it seems, is the quintessential example of oft silent struggle that nontraditional students face when entering the demanding world of college preparatory academics. I ask Kate how her family situation is influencing her current work in school.

Right now with my classes, it puts a lot of pressure on me and like my mom, every time she gets home she obviously tells me like, did you get your work done and all these things. But like throughout the day I have to constantly remind myself to get my work done and to stay focused and take up all the time I have offered in school to get my work done because outside of school a lot of the times I probably wouldn't be able to focus or I won't like – I have other things to do because I also have to do things around my house since my mom isn't there to do them. And then with college, since she's alone, it's always like in my head that I can't go out of state because I can't leave my mom alone. I can't go to a school that's super far away in northern California because my mom's alone. But at the same time my top choice schools are in northern California. The closest one that I want to go to is in San Francisco and that's already really far. And like in my head I'm always thinking about my mom. Will she be able to be alone all this time? [Be]cause her whole life she's had me.

It is an unenviable position in which to be, particular as a sixteen-year old young woman. With each interaction with Kate, my understanding of her grows; her independence, her focus, even her initial aloofness makes sense in the context of her situation. It makes the importance of the school support system that much more important to her. As a study participant, how Kate views the supports offered to her, particularly QUEST, is quite

intriguing, for I believe she is, in many ways, the prototypical student for this type of program.

Kate's experience and feelings about QUEST seem to mirror Angelica's; QUEST played a major role in what she feels was a successful transition to the high school honors/AP program. In our first interview I ask how QUEST influenced her interactions at school.

The first year it made me feel really safe [be]cause I knew everybody in the program and it gave me some characteristics I didn't really have before. It helped me develop my character and my like persona. And going into sophomore year, they added more people, so it became more, a bit more varied and I met a lot of new people. And now junior year it was, at first it was a bit of a difference because we didn't really know many people, but with all the characteristics they taught me and like all these new change developments, they helped me. Um, I adapted easily and I made new friends and I'm still really good friends with people in classes now.

Kate's choice of the word "safe" is notable and reminds me of the way Angelica spoke about the program. QUEST offers more than academic support for Kate; its value is in the familial atmosphere that was created with the cohort model. She says it "helped me develop my character and my like persona," building up her confidence to participate in the honors/AP program. As she continues to discuss the program, I learn that like her fellow participants, QUEST offered her entrée into a world in which she did not belong.

*Do you think you would have taken AP or honors courses were you not in QUEST as a ninth grader?*

I think I wouldn't have taken them because they intimidated me a lot. Just thinking about them like – Advanced Placement. I didn't really put myself under that category until QUEST came up and they like, they sort of pushed me into that and now it's totally all I take.

*In thinking about your AP and honors classes that you have taken as part of the QUEST program, do you think your experience would have been different had you not had that QUEST cohort with you*

Um, I think it would have, because QUEST was sort of like a support cushion for me because AP and honors, like I said, it was, it's intimidating. And with the support of QUEST, they always helped me, they're like, "it's going to be okay, you can handle it." Like when I thought I wasn't going to be able to do something like the AP test, I thought I wasn't gonna be able to handle that and Ms. [Mason] she was always there like, "no, you guys can do it." She helped us review, she provided all these resources.

The QUEST support helped to build Kate's self-belief. It not only offered invitation into the world of the academically elite; it also helped to redefine the characters of the world, showing Kate, and her fellow students, that students with their racial, cultural, and socio-economic background – nontraditional students in this world – could be successful there.

*Do you think it was the teachers of QUEST, the curriculum of QUEST, the social aspect of QUEST? What was it about QUEST that you think helped...?*

The teachers and the social aspect because the teachers are always there to support us and like push us to be the best we could be. And socially it was like everybody supported each other. Nobody brought each other down. They were all there and were like "if you need help, I'm here to help you." And they provided tutoring during lunch at all times. They were very flexible with their schedules for us and since we were kids and we all had similar classes, it was really easy for us too.

Kate appreciates the social and academic supports that the cohort model of QUEST provided for her. For her the teachers' flexibility felt like needed assistance to provide students with the best chance to succeed as they transitioned; this is similar to Angelica's stance, but differs from Carlos and Joseph who found the QUEST cohort did not offer them a realistic honors/AP experience. In this section too, Kate again references the social support that QUEST offered; earlier she admitted that, prior to entering high school, AP classes intimidated her. The fact that QUEST allowed her an entry point into Advanced Placement where "everybody supported each other" and "nobody brought each other down" is significant for her.

Kate's recollection of QUEST, I should note, is not one hundred percent positive. As mentioned earlier, Kate's second interview, occurring after the focus group, was less guarded than her first. While certainly not disparaging, she was less protective of the school, its teachers, and its programs, and, as such, offered a broader telling of her QUEST experience. In her second interview, Kate maintained her appreciation for the program, however, she also discussed where she saw its limitations.

*So when you went into the class, did you feel prepared to go into AP US history?*

I thought I was prepared because I did have Ms. [Mason] and she would always like attack us with all these things. And I was like, okay US History it's going to be 100% way more easier than AP World because it's just the US compared to like the whole wide world. But when I got into that class and we started writing essays, that was when I really realized that in my AP World class we didn't really learn a lot of that stuff. Like it was all history, history, but there was also going to be essays, especially on the AP test there's going to be essays and like long essay questions, short answer questions, document based questions...

Kate admits that while she went into APUSH confidently because of her experience in AP World, when she arrived she found that there were gaps in skills that weren't addressed in her first AP class. It is the "rude awakening" of APUSH that all of the participants discuss.

*So you felt unprepared and so do you feel like you didn't get pushed enough in your AP world or there were gaps in AP world in the skills part of AP world?*

Yeah, I definitely felt that there were gaps in AP world because like my teacher gave us all these assignments all the time and um, like obviously she, if she has all these assignments, I think it was to like show a diverse collection of what we were going to do in APUS. But when it came to like writing, I felt like she left that out. That was the one gap my teacher left out in that class and that's why I felt so unprepared when I went into like APUS.

To hear that she felt gaps in writing preparation was not a surprise; all of the participants to some extent mentioned feeling unprepared for the rigors of writing that came with APUSH. When she discusses her beliefs about why the gaps may have occurred, I am, as usual with Kate, somewhat taken aback by her blunt response.

I feel like my teacher didn't [prepare us as well]. Like there was sort of a bias there because since it was QUEST and it was like we were all first generation kids, I feel like they wanted to see us succeed and that's what their mind was. Like if you're in QUEST you have to succeed because we have to show this program works. And so I feel like my teacher pushed us and gave us all this work and she gave us so many extra opportunities too for those kids who are failing to get their grades up because I think she wanted to show like this class is a success. This program works and these kids are getting ahead, they'll pass this AP class and that's all we wanted. Because they wanted us to push ourselves and to be able to take classes we thought we couldn't handle. And so I felt like that was her mindset and that class it was like, "okay you have to succeed; we have to show that this works." And so I feel like with the other [AP World] classes I would ask them like what are you doing? And they'd be like, "oh we're doing this." And it's not due for like two weeks and like us, we had an assignment one day, it's due the next day. And that's what resulted in a lot of kids being like "Can you send me the homework? Can you like let me copy some things?" And it's just like, "Yeah, of course." [Be]cause it's a lot of pressure to get it all done in one night...

Upon first blush, Kate's assessment of the motives behind the program and her teacher's choices feels controversial, inflammatory even. And yet, I realize that her appraisal is not so far off from her fellow participants, particularly Carlos and Joseph who found the preparation from the AP World class lacking. Kate's notion that their teacher offered multiple opportunities to ensure that students wouldn't fail the class – the flexibility that she praised in her first interview and that Angelica considered a lifeline – seems similar to the allowances made for by Mr. Masters in the APUSH class during tutoring sessions and beyond. The fact, however, that Kate believes Ms. Mason offered these options not as universal supports to help all students – something Angelica called for – but rather as special offerings for QUEST

students to ensure they can succeed and “show that the program works” is what Kate attributes to bias. They are actions that can gnaw away at self-belief rather than build them. Winning a rigged game is a hollow victory at best, and if, as Joseph feared, the perception from privileged peers and even teachers is that the QUEST AP World class has different standards and expectations than the traditional AP World class, it begins to lose its value as true transition course and as a way to “level the playing field” in AP courses for nontraditional students.

As has been seen with all of the participants, programming supports are important to the successful transition of nontraditional students into the world of honors/AP. These programs, however, operate within the realm of teachers and students; and, it is ultimately their actions that determine how well students enter into and operate within these worlds. Kate’s experience in APUSH, for example, is colored, both positively and negatively, by the teachers and peers with whom she interacted.

*Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.* As Kate and I discuss more specifically her experiences in her APUSH class, I am mindful that she shares her class period with Joseph. I look to compare and contrast their views on student and teacher interactions within the class.

Like Joseph, Kate notes that Latinx students are a minority in the class.

*When you enter your class, do you find that the racial makeup of the class is mixed like the school or not so much?*

Not so much. Um, I feel like my APUS class is mostly dominated by Whites and just like the few close spots of Asians and Chinese ethnicity. But then there's that one little group of like Mexicans in there as well.



We discuss where the students sit in the class and Kate confirms that the students were able to choose their own seats, and in doing so self-segregated within the room. Kate offers her own take on why this happens.

We got to choose our seats and right when we chose our own seats we automated. I automatically sat with like the four other kids including [Joseph] and my AP and honors classmates that are Mexican and Hispanic because obviously I bond with them more. And then around us, it's just like all these other kids have more things in common and like bond more. But for us, since we're the only nontraditional kids in there, it's easier to just stay between us and form our own little circle and little group instead of talking to everybody else.

The problems that result from students being able to choose their own seats is a common theme among all of the participants. Kate's take is interesting, for it appears she was nominated among the small group of Mexican-American students within the class to serve as the spokesperson.

Yeah, when my teacher assigns us to do these things called town hall meetings where we have to interact with other people, um, I'm always, I feel like I'm always the one in my group that goes around and talks to people. And then my friends, like they sit down and then when I go back they're like, "Can I copy what you wrote?" Because they're too shy to go around. And what we always say is like, we don't know anybody, like it's the end of the school year and we still don't talk to a lot of people in this class. So I always had to go around and I always had to like build up the courage to go talk to other people...

This lack of participation in group work is mirrored in the students' willingness to participate in whole group discussions. I recall from the other student participants that Mr. Masters generally calls on volunteers during these times; Kate confirms and offers her own insights.

He always asks for volunteers, but even then it's always the same people that are raising their hands. So it was just like, let's see some new faces, let's hear some new voices. And then that's when he'll pick on other kids.

*Okay.*

And then, even then, every time when the teacher says like, “let's pick on some new kids,” we're just like, “oh my God.” I was like, “Don't pick on me. I don't have the answer.” I feel like it's always like that.

These moves by the teacher to offer freedom of choice in seating and in groups, and to primarily take voluntary participation, is again shown to be limiting for nontraditional students specifically, but can be regarded as questionable practice for all. When students self-segregate the ability to cross-pollinate ideas, to hear and wrestle with differing perspectives, and to practice civil discourse is curbed. In cases like this, we see that students can go an entire school year without having any meaningful interaction with non-alike peers. For a nontraditional student in Kate's APUSH class, it means that while this small group of Mexican-American students has physically entered the figured world, in practice they remain outsiders, to the extent that they have enlisted an ambassador, Kate, who is the only one to actually enter the world in which the main actors inhabit. And even brave Kate exhibits her own trepidation in speaking within this world, hoping that she will not be called on, believing that she doesn't have the answer. It makes sense, then, when asked about specific things teachers could do to help nontraditional students navigate the class, Kate specifically addresses this matter of student choice.

I feel like for nontraditional kids maybe teachers could instead of giving us like our own choices or say, I feel like they could assign us different seats. So we're not all clumped together, because we're all clumped together. We're obviously not going to talk to anybody else. So I feel like they should assign us like someone who they think would be a good person to sit with or a good partner for certain activities. Because although sometimes you'll be like “Oh, I don't wanna be there, I want to be with my friends,” it's just like you'll socialize more. Then you'll get more out there instead of just building up those walls around you and your little group. Like it's more, it's easier to get out there.

The need for teachers to help students interact with each other is directly related to the insecurity that some nontraditional students feel upon their entrée into the figured world.

Kate notes that her alike peers are “shy”, indicating an underlying fear of having to intermingle within this unfamiliar world. Kate talks about her own lack of confidence as she approaches privileged students within her APUSH class.

I feel like there's a lot of kids in that class who are smarter, like really smart and then when I think of it in that way, I'm just like, what if what I'm saying is wrong? Like I know researched this and I fact checked it, but what if it's still wrong? That's always a thought I have. And so when I approach other kids, I'm just like, they probably don't like the thing I researched, they probably don't know anything about it and they probably wouldn't even know if it's wrong, but I'm in my head, I'm still like, what if they check it afterwards and what if it turns out to be wrong and they call me out on it. That's always what I think.

*What makes you think they're smarter? What gives you that opinion?*

Obviously like scores and all these things. In one of my classes my teacher even does this thing where if you have a 95% or higher, you don't have to take the final. So when I don't have 95% or higher, that makes me feel even worse. I'm just like, okay I took the final; I'm not as smart as these kids. And then APUSH...my teacher, when he hands back essays, he puts them on this desk and you have to look for your own. So obviously you see all these other people's scores and it's just like, oh they got a five, they got six and I'm just like, “Oh I got a four and a three.” So it's just like I wonder what they did in their essay that I didn't do.

Here Kate reveals a teacher move that unintentionally feeds into her own self-doubt.

Certainly a move related to efficiency, placing graded essays on the desk for students to pick up can be knotty. It contributes to the ranking system in the figured world that can leave nontraditional students positioned lower among their more established peers. Kate looks at the scores and wonders if she belongs; she wonders too if her privileged peers may have the same question about her. It is a similar challenge with any publication of student scores or other attempts to motivate using student grades, as is the case of the exemption from the final.

For Kate, not meeting the 95% threshold is not motivating, it, in fact, has the opposite effect, making her “feel even worse” and helping to cement her belief that she is truly “not as smart as these kids.”

This lack of confidence from Kate and exhibited by the other nontraditional students in her class is as much about how they position themselves in class as it is about how they are positioned by others. The innate anxiety that Kate references above – fear of saying something wrong, doing something wrong in the eyes of their peers – affects how she and her alike peers engage and participate in the class. It is an anxiety that stems from being a neophyte in the figured world and Kate opens up and speaks extensively about it as we discuss her perception of her, and others, identity within the honors/AP world.

*Academic and personal identity in the figured world.* During the study Kate slowly peels away the layers that protect her as she navigates an academic and social world in which she is in constant negotiation. She lives in what seems to be unremitting insecurity – academic, yes, but also social and personal. With a vulnerable economic status, a mother working long hours, and no one in her immediate family with a high school diploma, Kate enters the educational realm essentially alone and already on shaky ground. Compounded by institutional and individual racial and cultural biases that marginalize and stereotype her, Kate’s personal identity – defined by a life on margins – intertwines with an evolving student identity to inform her placement into the academically elite world of honors and AP. Kate’s own understanding of her positioning, particularly how she positions herself within her AP classes, seems to grow as we discuss her interactions in APUSH.

*Do you think your situation influences how you interact in class or how you go about doing things in class?*

I think not because all the times in class I don't like to show how sometimes I feel like really deep inside. I try to socialize a lot and talk to all these people just so I'll have my friends there to support me... It makes things easier for me because I get to learn all these new ideas. And then sometimes if I have my own idea or something for a class or something, I can build off of other people's ideas and for me it's easier. So I choose to interact more with people. Even if I don't have that relationship with my mom, I can't interact with her as much; it's easier for me to interact with people at school and the school setting.

In this exchange it appears that Kate, recognizing that she has little support at home, turns outward – becomes more social at school – in order to get the assistance she needs to navigate the class. She states that she chooses to “socialize a lot and talk to all these people,” so I push to have her clarify with whom it is she interacts.

*Do you feel you interact pretty equally with the people in your, in your AP and honors classes?*

I definitely don't. I feel like I bond more with those who are more like me. Like the group of kids in my class that's Hispanic. I feel like I have more things in common with them compared to someone who's like of an Asian background or like a White person, because they're obviously not as similar to me and although I have been in the United States my whole life, it's still like there's that culture and cultural barrier.

Kate's gravitation to alike peers is not surprising; however, this, along with the quote above does offer insight as to why she allows herself to be a “spokesperson” for the small group of Mexican American students in the class. She recognizes the need to extend beyond herself – and her small group – if she is to succeed in class. She values what she learns from others, stating it's “easier” for her when she builds off of the ideas of others. The belief, though, that she needs other's ideas, particularly those privileged, traditional students in the class, appears to be a barrier and actually limits Kate's self-confidence. She has difficulty believing that her ideas are as valuable as the ideas of those traditional students and, as such, often silences herself during times of discussion.

I feel like I can't always transfer what my mind wants to say onto a piece of paper or on to other people as much. Like sometimes in my other classes when I'm talking, my teachers are like "wow you're so articulate; you can express yourself really easily." Today we read a narrative paper and I read mine out loud and you have to read it like with – you had to show emotion and my teacher was like, "Wow, that was really good. You showed like all this emotion and you portrayed this picture in like our heads." But when it comes to AP classes, I'm just like, wow, these kids are probably picturing in their heads [that] they are more articulate than me. They can express their ideas better and in that class, I feel like I shut my ideas down. I'm just like, no, like this isn't a good idea...I just want to hear other people's ideas. I'm just like, wow, that was obviously way better than mine. Like they're up here and I'm all the way down here. So that's where I just positioned myself. Like [inaudible] I'm down here. I should probably not try to step forward because then what if someone just thinks in their head – like I can't control what people think. So what if I say something and then they just say in their heads just like, "What is she even saying? Does she hear herself?" So I'm just like, I'm going to put myself down here and I'm not going to speak because I'd rather keep my ideas to myself than be wrong and then someone thinks something bad of me.

Despite little actual evidence to support her belief about her abilities, Kate's fear of not appearing as "smart" or as articulate as her privileged peers has led her to become silent in her AP class. She lives in a constant state of worry that her answers will not be good enough and that her peers will deride her answers; as such, she purposely positions herself lower in the class, because, as she notes, she would rather be silent than wrong. Curious, I ask if she believes her classmates feel the same.

I think so because rarely [do] any of them talk. The only time we have to talk is when we have to, or we're called on, or we don't have an option. But even then sometimes some of them will say, "I don't know; I don't know the answer," but I'm just like, "Yeah, you do; you know the answer." But it's just like, no, what if it's wrong? When I share I would say, "I don't know." And then my teacher goes on to pick someone else and I'm just like, "Oh, they said the answer," and we're just like, "we were right." It's just like, "Let's just not answer instead because what if we were still wrong?"

Kate and her alike peers silence themselves in an attempt to not look badly – to have the wrong answers – in front of their more privileged peers. There seems to be a belief that a

wrong answer will jeopardize their membership in this figured world, will reveal them to be imposters in a world in which they do not actually belong. I find irony in this move. Kate readily chooses to position herself lower in the class with her silence in an attempt to solidify her placement in the figured world; and yet, it is this silence – the refusal to answer, the “I don’t know” when called upon – that calls into question her knowledge and qualification to be there. I am reminded of Joseph, her fellow classmate, who also believes that his privileged peers don’t deem him to be as smart or to have as much to contribute; he, too, admitted to being less participatory in class. If, in fact, as Holland et. al posit, interactions among the characters of the figured world help to define position and rank within the world, Kate and her alike peers, through their actions of silence and their privileged peers and teacher’s reaction to that silence, are relegated to the position of other within the figured world.

I find Kate’s lack of self-confidence to be particularly poignant. She is scholarly, thoughtful, and has shown a strong academic work ethic; and yet, throughout the study she expressed her belief that the privileged students in her class were not only smarter than she was, but worked harder as well. In one of her later journals she comments

Unlike some of my peers, I also did have to try a lot to get to where I was because I think a lot of those kids in the class also are really motivated to study and I do not identify as one of those people. I think that's another huge difference because it takes a lot for me to study and a lot for me to memorize, because although I do study my memory capacity isn't the greatest.

And there's some kids in there who barely read a day and they pass. Unlike me, I have to read for like a month to just pass one simple exam and memorize all the content going through every day. I use all the life hacks I find on Pinterest like chewing mint gum helps you memorize something more effectively than when you're not chewing mint gum. And I think it's because some of them have trained their brains to memorize the content more effectively. And I used to have really good memory, so I think I didn't really train my brain appropriately and I'm suffering (Journal 6).

She continues in her final journal.

A lot of kids in there are smarter than me because they give like 100% of their time to their AP classes. But I don't. I give a good amount of time to my AP classes, but I think high school is about having fun as well (Journal 10).

As I listen to Kate and read her journals, it seems that she sets an unusually high standard for what she believes “smart” AP students do; it is a standard, it appears, that she can never reach. While she accepts the label of “scholar” from her friend group, she does not believe herself to be a scholar within the overall class of AP students. As a neophyte in this world, she cannot believe herself to be on the same level as those traditional students, and as a result, limits herself and places a ceiling on her abilities. I wonder, as I review Kate’s words and actions, if her goal is not so much to solidify her membership in this figured world of APUSH, as it is to not be discovered as an imposter in this world.

As a virtual trailblazer in the APUSH classroom, it is no wonder that Kate questions her abilities. She has not seen any version of herself – no racial/cultural, socioeconomic alike models – within an elevated status or position in APUSH, only silence and insecurity. Moreover, the messages presented in the class itself regarding Mexican American and Latinx peoples are also those of silence, subjugation and otherness. With such a limited viewpoint offered, Kate’s fellow study participants struggled with engagement and connection in the class. Kate, unsurprisingly, has a slightly different viewpoint and expectation; while she acknowledges the marginalization and gaps within it, she presumes little from a curriculum “biased towards White people.” (Interview 2)

*The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.* Kate’s interest in APUSH seems to extend beyond the practical benefits of weighted grades and possible college credits. In her journals and interviews she expresses a deep interest in her ancestry and culture that appears



to extend to genuine interest in history in general. She notes in her sixth journal that “more than half of those kids in that class are there for the AP credit and to take one less class in college,” and that “a lot of kids weren’t in there actually to learn about this country and its history.” For herself, however, she acknowledges that while she thinks that “saving money” is something they all had in common, she wanted to “actually engage” in the content.

[I]t all really interests me because although I knew about some of the things we’ve learned in that class previously, that class has gone more into depth and showed me a lot about what I thought I knew and what I didn’t know. I think it helps me learn more about this country and misjudgments people have had about it and its history (Journal 6).

Her personal background appears to have played a part in her historical interests, particularly her Mexican heritage.

My parents have also taught me a lot and they made an effort for me to learn by sending me to some places like Mexico or I always learned about my culture because I’m from Oaxaca, and that’s a very cultural place...it really helps to send me every year and explore and I love going. I love learning about my culture...

I think learning about my history is very important because it obviously makes up a part of who I am, a huge part of who I am. I don’t identify specifically as a White person, even though I was born in America. When someone asks me what race I am, I say I’m Mexican, I’m just born in America.

I think my history is a huge part of who I am and some people don’t acknowledge it and some Mexicans call other Mexicans “Whitewashed” which is just like you let yourself get influenced by a different culture, specifically the American culture. But I don’t think I’m like that. I think my culture has a very special place in my heart, and I love the traditions and the celebrations of folklore, everything behind my culture.

I think it’s very important for kids to grow up learning where they’re from, their roots, their parents’ homes. Because a lot of kids nowadays don’t even like to go to where their parents are from. I’m one of those select few that enjoy it...if I didn’t learn about my culture, I think I would have grown up my whole life feeling as if I was missing a part of myself because I didn’t learn about who I was and who my parents were because they, my parents, play a huge role in

my life. Missing like their history and not learning about it, it would have made me feel incomplete in a way.

Kate's connection and appreciation for her own history undoubtedly comes through.

With yearly trips to her family's native Oaxaca, she is grateful to have the opportunity to learn first-hand about her culture. In this same journal she also notes that she reads things online, "follows some pages on social media regarding Hispanic culture," and watches the news on "channels that are Spanish dedicated for Spanish speakers only." She takes particular pride in being Mexican, explaining that she is not like some Mexicans who are "Whitewashed...like you let yourself get influenced by...American culture."

With an interest in her specific cultural history, and an interest in US history as well, I looked forward to Kate's take on the presentation of the APUSH curriculum. From her sixth journal it appeared that she would be relatively forgiving. In speaking of the history presented she says

I think I would have liked Chicano studies more mixed up into there. But I knew that it wasn't going to be that way because it's called AP US History not AP Mexican History, that's another class for another day (Journal 6).

Like her study participant peers, however, she also recognizes that there is, in fact, very little presented about her racial and cultural heritage in the APUSH curriculum.

The only times I learned about my background is when it came to like statistics in my textbook about how immigration has increased and how alien immigrants, as like they're called sometimes in the textbook, have played a role in some like racial problem or like riots or such.

In our second interview she speaks more in-depth.

I'm full Hispanic and the only thing related to Hispanics – to like Mexicans – that we learned about in that class was the Mexican American war. And so that was the only time I was like, wow, I can relate to this...

*Do you feel like as a Mexican American young woman; do you feel like AP U.S. History told the story of your Mexican American history?*

I feel like it did not, especially because when it came to learning other things that didn't take place in this country or even a little detail, it was like different people. Like if something came up about people in Britain, he'd be like, "But we're not gonna learn about them. I'm not going to go more into depth because this is U.S. History." So it was like, okay, we can't learn about anything else because it's U.S. History... I want to learn about my people and my culture where like my mom came from because that was also, it's also really interesting for me to learn about all that history and not just like the United States...

*Did AP US History give the overall sense that America is a diverse place?*

I feel like it tried to, but it didn't really put it up there. It was just like "America is diverse" but, like, let's focus on the people who live here now. [Be]cause it's like always "This is U.S. History, not American studies, not Mexican studies, not German studies or all these other cultures. The United States."

I find this exchange and Kate's perception of what is and is not allowed to be taught in U.S. History to be quite interesting. There is a sense from her – that appears to stem from both the what and the how her teacher presents – that the history of the United States is finite in its scope and does not bleed past its actual geographical boundaries. This idea that it's "not like American studies, not like Mexican studies, not like German studies or like all these other cultures" speaks to a nationalistic narrative that I had not heard from other participants.

*So how would you define us history based on what you learned in class?  
What's your definition of U.S. History?*

I think it would be biased towards White people. People who now claim this is their land, even though before it was like all these other people. I think now it's just biased towards one certain majority group of people because all these other people are considered minorities and so now it's like we're the majority living here. You know what, 'minorities get out.'

I recognize that Kate's description goes deeper than simply exclusion from a textbook. She continues.

I don't like it, [be]cause I think even though I'm a minority I make a huge impact, a major impact on the economy here and I play a role in it too. Like even if you consider my people as just one small group of people, you're like, "You're minority, you don't matter. You could leave and nothing would change." But really Mexicans, we have a huge impact on the economy here. We also work, we find our own jobs, we don't take them. So it's just like we are not a minority. You might consider us a minority, but we have a major impact on everything here. The United States just doesn't depend on like one certain group of people's work...it depends on this whole different scale of all of these people of different colors – light skin, dark skin...everybody plays an important role here. It's not just the one group of people.

It is clear that Kate was reacting not only to what she saw as a gap in the curriculum related to people of color, but also to the socio-political narrative being debated outside of the classroom and school walls. I wondered if she ever felt the opportunity to discuss these larger issues, and the historical origin of them, within her APUSH class.

No, there wasn't because like I said, it was always like U.S. So we're not gonna discuss the minorities. And if minorities were discussed, it was just really important, like social issues that were really big, like the bigger ones. So the minority groups that were discussed were like, LGBTQ during the civil rights movement. But that was like the only time that we were able to discuss this and after that it was just like, "Okay, we're moving on; that's closed off." And we wouldn't really have a discussion about like minority groups in the United States.

And so when I would learn about something, I'm like, "I'm curious about this." And then I had to go online and research it myself and then it'd be like, oh, "Okay, this is what this is about."

*So would you say then that the, the curriculum of AP US history, does it give a full view of the US?*

I feel like it does not. I feel like it just gives you the view it wants you to know. [Be]cause at the same time, there are a lot of events that are left out of history textbooks. I feel like they just include the ones that they think, like the author's think, that really changed the United States. But there's also these other smaller events that also changed the United States and had an impact. Like one thing doesn't just happen and it stays there. Like if something happens there's obviously like a ripple effect and all these other events happen; but they just leave them out, they exclude them from the textbook. So I feel like the curriculum just shows you what it wants you to know and not all these other things that happened.

The ideas that Kate discusses are not new. Her fellow participants all discuss their frustration with both the gaps in the curriculum and the inability to learn about peoples of color and, as Kate states “minority” groups, beyond brief, surface level discussion. Kate recognizes the limits of the course, it is a survey of United States history, and yet her perception that “the curriculum just shows you what it wants you to know” rings true. I consider her example of being presented with the story of Christopher Columbus in APUSH class.

I think the part that always frustrates me is Christopher Columbus discovered America when it wasn't that he discovered it. Every time that came up, like in my head, the first thought that popped up was like, “Lie not what happened. America was already inhabited. He didn't discover it.” Mr. [Masters] actually pointed it out. It says he discovered it, but he didn't. Just to put it out there because I think that's something we all should know.

*So Mr. [Masters] did acknowledge that-*

He didn't discover it, yeah.

*Okay. Did the textbook say that he discovered it?*

Yeah, we watched videos too, because I guess that's how it's stated in history, but that's not what happened.

As with other racially/culturally sensitive topics, the narrative that is presented to the class is highly controlled by the teacher. Kate explains that Mr. Masters “pointed out” that Columbus didn’t “discover” the Americas, but went on to show videos and read the text that said otherwise. There appears to be an apprehension to veer too far away from the established narrative as these sensitive topics are presented. On one hand, Mr. Masters acknowledges “the lie”, on the other hand he validates it within the class through the videos and the text.

Without opportunity to discuss with their peers, I wonder what message the students take away from this lesson.

Kate notes that with most of the racially/culturally sensitive material, that Mr. Masters always says that “this is a serious thing” and tells them “don’t joke about anything” and because of that “nobody even thinks about saying anything wrong.” Students, privileged and not, are silent until, as Kate notes, “the mood sort of [goes] up because...we’re stepping out of this sad moment. And now we’re like going into a better part of history.” It is striking to me that Kate essentially describes the presentation of these elements of the historical record as “sad moments” to get through to make it “into a better part of history.” It speaks to a history of peoples of color that is not only relegated to the margins – mere punctuation marks in the grander narrative – but is equated not with resilience and asset, but rather with disadvantage and weakness. A history to pity, to “not joke about”, and ultimately, to move through quickly.

### **Case Study Five: Evan**

My history with Evan feels long. He was not an SMMS student, but I came to know him as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at SMHS and continued to monitor him during his time in QUEST and beyond. It would be an understatement to say that Evan is memorable – his personality is unapologetically large; his presence is significant; and more often than not he is the center around which rooms revolve. A self-proclaimed “6 foot, 245-pound brown... flamboyant gay man,” I recall clearly that in his early years of high school, Evan could be as easily found in the midst of a crowd as he could be in the midst of a controversy. Of all of the participants, he is, by far, the most outspoken and the most opinionated; and as the only student in the study to attend SEMS, I looked forward to learning about his unique experience and perspective. Vexingly, but perhaps as I came to learn not surprisingly, Evan proved to be my most challenging participant. Attempts at communication and tracking him down was often maddening, and after dozens of broken promises to meet deadlines, I resigned myself to the reality that I would receive no journal entries from him to study. We did, however, conduct two lengthy individual interviews and, true to form, Evan not only participated, but led the conversation within the focus group interview. His perspective and comments from these three encounters are, I believe, unique and detailed enough to be worthy of inclusion among those participants who had more data from which to pull.

Evan’s middle school report cards show that he was enrolled in honors courses at SEMS beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He earned a 3.14 and 3.00 GPA, respectively, in first and second semester of sixth grade, receiving an A (Language Arts) and B (Reading) in his two designated honors courses. In that same academic year, I note that on both report cards, five of six teachers indicate that he is “a pleasure to have in class.”

His grades declined in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, as did the number of positive comments that he received from teachers. He took Honors Language Arts that year, earning a D+ first semester and a C+ the second semester. He also earned a D+ in first semester Math and in second semester World History. He had a 2.5 GPA in his 7<sup>th</sup> grade year, and his World History and Math teachers commented in his report cards on “missing or late homework assignments” and “classroom assignments not completed regularly.”

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade Evan did not enroll in any honors courses. His GPA in both semesters that year was a 2.57. He continued to struggle in math, getting a D both semesters; but he maintained a C or above in his remaining classes. Comments from his teachers improved from 7<sup>th</sup> grade year, save his US History teacher who noted that the “student not working to potential.” This is not the last time that Evan will hear this comment.

Evan’s up and down grade achievement continued in high school. In his ninth grade year, he took a challenging schedule of QUEST, Spanish, Concert Band, and Marching Band along with Honors English, Algebra 1, and Bio Med; he earned a 3.57 and 3.33 GPA first and second semester. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade he continued with two band classes and added Yearbook/Journalism, earning an A in these three courses both semesters. In first semester he also earned a B in AVID, a new course for him, and in Honors English; and he received Cs in Chemistry, AP World History, and Geometry. He finished that first semester with a 3.13 GPA. In second semester he added yet another class, Air Force JROTC, extending his school day from the usual six periods to eight. He ended the year with a 3.5 GPA, earning five As, including in Honors English, one B in AP World History, and a C in both Geometry and Chemistry.



I am struck by Evan's class load in his first two years of high school. A typical student would expect to earn 30 credits each semester; through extended school days, either a 6:50am zero period or an after school seventh period he earns an extra five or ten credits each semester. In his sophomore year he took both zero and seventh period; it is a pace and load that would be difficult for any student to maintain. It appeared to take its toll in his junior year when his grades plummet to a 2.43 and 2.0 GPA in each semester. He failed Algebra 2 for the year, earned a D in AP Biology first semester, and received three Ds second semester in Spanish 2, APUSH, and AP English Literature.

It is a transcript that reads of a student intent on accessing rigorous and varied coursework with varying levels of achievement, and I wonder the impetus of his academic choices. Knowing that he is the only participant from SEMS, I wonder if his attendance there has played a role.

*Middle school expectations and preparation.* Evan's recollection of this time in his academic career is mixed at best. Unlike his participant peers from SMMS, however, his negative opinion doesn't seem to stem from perceived lack of preparation for high school, but rather a belief that his school overemphasized grades and status to the detriment, at times, of student learning.

It was a very school first, school second, school third, school last, fun maybe, type of education where you know you're always being pressured to get the best grades...the best test scores, and it wasn't necessarily for the student's sake; it was more for the school's reputation. They wanted to be seen as a school that is a high education standard so they applied a lot of pressure on the students.

Evan has a belief that his education at SEMS was less about student needs and more about adult aspirations. On two occasions he referenced a comment made by his eighth grade

science teacher that seems to have colored his viewpoint of the opportunities available at SEMS.

My eighth grade physical science teacher said that we only have honors classes at the middle school level to keep the parents who donate money in high amounts happy because they want their students to be seen as the best of the best in candidate options.

It is, of course, arresting that Evan's science teacher would make this remark to his students, but, my shock aside, I cannot discount that this message resonated with Evan. In each of his interviews he made commentary regarding what he believes was an "honors for all" attitude by the school, not so much to meet the academic needs of students, but more to appease an image and expectation set forth by the community. As a student, he says he felt pressured to be in honors and was questioned when he chose not to enroll in eighth grade. He offered an example

In my eighth grade year I was in a CP English class and my teacher was like "Why aren't you in my honors class?" And I was like... "I did honors English both years and...I didn't really see a difference between the CP and the honors classes." She was like, "No, you guys do move just a little bit faster when you're in honors." And I was like, "Well, I don't see the point then."

Evan's experience in SEMS, though significantly different from the student experience at SMMS, does show similarities in the perception of the middle school honors program and its preparation for the rigors of high school honors and AP. Like his fellow participants, he did not believe that there was a significant difference between the general college preparatory (CP) courses and the honors courses – to the extent that he chose not to enroll in honors in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. His English teacher, in trying to convince him to return to honors English, seemed to inadvertently support this belief, stating that the difference between CP and honors was that the honors class moved "a little faster." In the focus group

interview, Evan mentioned that his science teacher made a similar admission. He stated that his teacher warned “that going into high school, the classes like that (honors) weren’t going to be the same. You are going to be pushed to a higher standard than just maybe being a chapter ahead a week.” Upon hearing this, Evan didn’t “see the point” in continuing his enrollment in middle school honors, despite what he saw as an overall push from the school for students to do so.

Evan did acknowledge, however, that the academic focus of the middle school was a benefit to students matriculating from SEMS to SMHS. During the focus group interview he recognized an advantage that he and other students from SEMS shared.

Evan: Being the only student in this group that went to [SEMS], which is typically where a lot of the students, you know, know the opportunities and know the pathways to take them. Growing up in that environment it was very school first... You can talk to a student who went to [SEMS] and it’ll be like “Yeah, I was in all honors in my eighth grade year so I just decided to keep with it.”

Like some of the people who I’ve met from [SMMS] didn’t get that same opportunity... from what I’ve heard, everyone else can comment on it, like they weren’t really being pushed to excel as much as they were just being pushed to finish.

Joseph: Yeah. I can see what you’re talking about because I never personally took any honors classes in middle school and I think that’s why is because I didn’t know how to. I wasn’t like aware and pushed as much as I am now.

Each of the SMMS students acknowledge that they didn’t feel the same push to enroll in honors or to excel academically as Evan had at SEMS. In this same portion of the focus group interview Evan adds

You guys have mentioned that you had to work hard and like in high school you had to learn the true value of education and you guys haven’t stopped working hard. The kids from [SEMS]... they’re just essentially in AP and honors classes because their mom and dad said so, so that they can get into a good four-year... not only did they get taught in school, but their parents could afford to teach them outside of school.

Evan is speaking to the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1985) from which students of SEMS benefit in their schooling. Not only do the students and parents of SEMS know the path that will lead to college and future success, Evan describes a system in which the will of the adults – both parents and educators – propels students forward on the track of elite academics by providing ample opportunity, encouragement (or pressure, according to Evan), and assistance in accessing and succeeding in middle school courses that articulate into the high school honors and AP program. Evan offers a noteworthy summation.

At the end of the day it all goes around to being that one middle school was in a lower income area, the other was in a higher income and they can't, you know, just go around saying that we're not giving the same opportunities to lower income students that we are to higher income students. Like they can put both of the same classes in each school...and at the end of the day it's just (uses air quotes) 'those students didn't take them.' But it's just a matter of the fact that they weren't being pushed to take them. While at the other school...they're getting the higher like, 'push these kids, push them kids, push them kids.'

[T]hen at the high school level you're just expected to both be at the same playing field and you know you hear teachers say that it doesn't matter if he came from [SMMS] or [SEMS], you guys both learned the same things, you guys should both be at the same levels, but it is very much like two different kinds of teaching.

*The role of school provided supports.* Based on his middle school experience, I was not surprised that Evan provided a different, though not contradictory, view of the supports that were offered at the high school. Very few students from SEMS were recruited into the QUEST program for the same reasons that were noted from Evan above – the notion of honors and AP was hardly a foreign conception for these students – but, as a student of color, a son of a single immigrant mother, and having a lower socio-economic status than his privileged peers, Evan himself was a nontraditional SEMS student. This background,

however, meant that Evan's view and appreciation of QUEST differed from his SMMS counterparts.

*Would you have taken honors and AP courses had you not been in QUEST?*

I think I definitely would have taken AP courses, but that's also just because I have a very scary Cuban mom at home. But I don't think that I would've been as successful without QUEST.

This does not come as a surprise, but his remark about his "Cuban mom at home" does offer one insight into his heavy class load. His impetus to take honors/AP courses, like his SEMS classmates, comes from both school and home. We talk further about his perceptions of QUEST.

*Do you think that being in QUEST Academy helped in your navigation of the school?*

I would say yes because it taught me that sometimes you know, everything in high school's not going to go your way personally and educationally and that sometimes, you know, teachers are going to have a preference about something. It might be the color of your skin, it might be you know, based on sexuality or gender, but teachers are going to favor one thing over the other and you know, you have to work extra hard to get through that place.

Evan offers a new insight into the support that the QUEST program offered students. With its social justice lens, it allowed a space for students and their QUEST teachers to discuss biases that they would face in their schooling and beyond. Evan notes that his QUEST teachers were "very socially conscious" which allowed him to become more aware of the discrimination and biases that existed within the school at large and within his own academic arena. I ask if he has any examples that he can point to in which he was aware that he was treated differently than his White peers.

In my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I was only friends with a predominant group of majority of White people and that was who I stuck around with. And I kind of realized that like, you know, the kind of teachers

that they would get treated sweetly by. There was almost like I was that one brown kid or there were like assumptions made about me. Like I don't – I speak a very little amount of Spanish and you know, there'd be a teacher who would be like, oh, [Evan] can go ahead and translate this for us, and I'm like, I don't, I can't, I don't know what that means. I don't speak Spanish... I'm multiracial; I'm Afro Cuban and Mexican and you know, they go ahead and just make the assumption that I'm one or try to just stereotype me into one cast and I'm just like, that's not me. That's not who I am.

At the time of this interview, I found this anecdote from Evan to be particularly interesting. I memoed, “He’s in a tough spot. His friend group is largely White (not surprised, he did go to SEMS), but he’s facing these microaggressions at school. Who does he talk to about this? Definitely not his friend group. His mom? Maybe this is where QUEST comes in for him?? Other people who are navigating similar things perhaps.” Though he does not explicitly state that QUEST offers him a social support, I suspect this to be the case. Whereas his fellow QUEST peers had largely been among a racially/culturally similar group at SMMS, Evan was among the very few students of color at SEMS, and as such, his initial friend group entering SMHS was limited to those with whom he attended middle school – students that were typically White and privileged. QUEST, with teachers that were “socially conscious” as Evan put it, and with students who faced their own experiences with racial/cultural bias, could potentially provide the social and emotional support necessary for Evan to make sense of situations like the one above. This incident, too, offers evidence that, despite different middle school experiences, upon entering high school, each of the participants had occasions in the academic setting in which their perception of their treatment, their perception of their abilities, or their perception of how others saw them was directly influenced by their race. For each, including Evan, QUEST seemed to be a mitigating factor.

Evan's need for additional support extended beyond those provided by the QUEST program, however. As we discussed his heavy course load and numerous extra-curricular activities, I again found common threads among his perceptions of the assistance provided by the school and those of his fellow participants. We take some time to discuss academic supports offered by the school and Evan's ability to access them.

Outside of my family life, I'm a very busy person extra-curricular wise. I have two jobs at the moment and um, I'm also on the color guard team, which is completely year round...I'm an AP ambassador along with like a student presenter for the school. So I'm constantly doing stuff and you know, I don't really get the chance to breathe or even like get much work done. If I do, it's in a very short segmented amounts of time and I'm having to like run here, do my homework here for a couple of minutes, go off to a presentation and do my homework for a couple of minutes. Practice, do my homework for a couple of minutes. It gets in the way or limits how much I can take on resources because for, let's say APUSH, there's two days of tutoring after school and on those specific two days I go and coach in middle school color guard team from two to three-thirty which is the exact time of the tutoring. So I have to try to work out deals with my teachers being like "Can I come in at lunch? Can I come in during break? Do you mind staying late on like Wednesday or something so that I can come and do the extra work that I needed to get done?"

Having reviewed his transcripts previously, as Evan talked I wondered why he just didn't let one or more of the extra-curricular activities go in order to allow time for his core academics. As he continued, however, I learned that his seeming preoccupation with outside activities was deeper than my initial understanding. He explained

I've had to figure out a way to get from school to my job back home in time to, you know, do school work, eat dinner, go to marching band rehearsal and balance, you know, doing all of that. Going to competitions on the weekend, working a job on the weekend, and all that stuff...All of that is because I want to have a fighting chance to have the ability of a stable position in the world so that I'm not viewed as another statistic; so that I'm viewed exceptionally. Because at the end of the day we all know the statistics and it's minorities that are lowest of the low on that statistic board. Right?

Evan's belief that he needs to prove that he is "exceptional" offers some explanation for his heavy extracurricular load; he intimates that because he is a person of color, in order to "have a fighting chance" at future success, he must do more – prove himself better – than his White, privileged peers. In his second interview he adds

For me, you know, we are all kind of starting essentially eighth grade in this giant "Hunger Games" style competition to reach a high potential in life to get into a great college, if that's the choice we want to be in. So, you know, we have to take all these extracurriculars and do all these activities so that we can start beefing up our resumes and you know, [be]cause kind of like it's been historically proven...that ethnic minorities do – we're kind of not doing that great on the college front...It's improving, which is a good thing; but, you know, it's because we're doing twice as more, twice as much as the White students.

His fellow participants echoed this sentiment of both needing to demonstrate their abilities, and also to overcome institutionalized biases and pervading stereotypes. As a woman of color, I recognize and empathize with the sentiment; I, myself, was reared with the import of exceptionalism, the need to be "better than" – lessons passed on from my father and generations before.

For Evan, though, there is some irony in his pursuit of excellence, for the more extracurricular activities he does, the more he takes away time from his studies, and his grades suffer for it. He recognizes a need to participate in the extra support provided, but cannot reconcile when the supports are offered with when his activities are scheduled. He chooses his activities. I ask if he thinks that there is flexibility among the staff to provide supports that fit the needs of all students.

I think that some of them have definitely tried to make the effort, but they also have schedules – the teachers and faculty members – also kind of have schedules, especially if they're a teacher that starts at zero period and leaves by sixth. It's very hard trying to convince them to stay late on a day that they don't have plans to stay late or don't have to stay late. And so they're like, "Well, you



know, these are the days that we're giving you. Like we don't have to be here, we're doing it for you to like come in.” But at times they can be very understanding about it. But other times there's just like, “No, like these are the dates.”

*What are the options available to you outside of class?*

So I believe for my AP US History class, it is Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 3 to 4:30 and then if you talk to him with enough time in advance, he will let you come in at lunch. But the issue for me is that on those specific two dates, I coach a middle school color guard program that goes from 2:30 to 4:30 and it's across town... I tried to communicate this with my teachers and for the most part they were understanding, but it was just difficult trying to convince them or get them to spend the free time that they already had pre-designatedly (sic) scheduled to stay at class for me to try to do test corrections, do make up work, and possibly even tutoring.

Evan's explanation of not being able to attend the APUSH tutoring is valid; however, I recall Angelica's description of Mr. Masters' flexibility and wonder if there is more to Evan's failure to take advantage of opportunities for extra support.

*Do you think that your difficulties in terms of having time to go into tutoring...is that simply because of your schedule?*

Well, at the beginning of the year I know that I definitely had time because with the marching band schedule, they made sure that there was enough time for you to go to tutoring hours. But that early in the year, I feel like a lot of students are still very timid and if you don't have the upbringing of like you belong in an AP class, you know, you stay timid for a very long time until it's even possibly too late to go in for assistance. And so I think that played a major factor...I'm not exactly like a traditional student. It's kind of one of those things where, you know, my mom's told me as a person of color I have to make sure that whatever I'm struggling with, if there's a person, if there's a White person – because they get better opportunities in society – if they're struggling with the same thing and asking for help, I have to make sure that I don't ask for help because I don't want to look as if I'm at the same amount of struggling or even weaker so that they can't take advantage of that. Which is something personal to my upbringing.

*Yeah.*

But I feel like that is almost consistent and some of the people of ethnic backgrounds that I've talked to, they've had the same talk with their parents,

which does make it very hard in an AP style class because you know you need that extra assistance but you don't want to ask because you don't want to give them the opportunity to take it as weakness.

This is a major revelation from Evan. While his schedule certainly plays a role in his inability to attend the supports offered after school; it becomes clear that he is also choosing not to receive extra help because he does not want it to be taken as a weakness. I am reminded of Kate and Joseph, who choose to be silent rather than possibly be seen as wrong in front of their peers, and Angelica who is in a constant state of worry about how her peers in APUSH view her. There is a need not to be seen as weak, but also not to be perceived as an other, as different, as one who does not belong in this elite academic world. Angelica's call for the tutoring options to be required for all also connects to Evan's discomfort with asking for support. If he can't attend sessions that have been offered, he does not want any extra done for him.

[y]ou don't want that one or that group of students that you're moving that stuff around for to be seen as a special or a pity case or something like that. So the idea of equal opportunity for faculty members, it's like, "Ok here, we gave all the students these days, these times they can come and do this." But a student that needs to go in and be like, "I'm sorry sir, like I can't come in on Tuesday, but do you think it's ok to come in on Wednesday?" they're going to view that as unequal because not all students get that chance with faculty members.

Despite his attendance at a different middle school, Evan's concerns are the same as his fellow participants. He is worried that he will not be seen as an equal, he is worried how he will be perceived by his teachers and his privileged peers. He mentions that he does not want to be a "pity case" nor does he want to be seen as "special." Evan participates in more extracurricular activities than his privileged peers and refuses supports that other students take

advantage of – he does extra-ordinary things simply so that he can be viewed as ordinary; it is the paradox that nontraditional students navigating elite academia often face.

It is not surprising, then, that how his teachers and fellow students react to and interact with him inform Evan’s beliefs about how he is perceived and ultimately, his behavior and experiences within his classes.

*Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.* When Evan and I talk specifically about his navigation of his APUSH class, I look to learn if his time at SEMS indeed influences his experiences in high school. Throughout middle school he had been a student of color with primarily White and privileged peers. Would this background allow him to interact differently, more confidently, as he matriculated into high school? And if so would his actions cause his peers or his teachers to treat him differently than the other participants in the study? We start by simply discussing the racial/ethnic make-up of his AP courses. He mentions that in his APUSH class “there were like maybe 10 of us among the class of 40.”

*That’s a minority.*

But I could definitely go to and be like, okay these people have a Hispanic descent/background. And of course there are those people who are like, yeah, my dad's half Mexican so I'm a quarter Mexican, you know, and he's still very much in touch with his Spanish roots. But you know, others not so much, but they can still necessarily like pull out the White card if they want it to.

*And do they?*

I would say that they do. I feel like, you know, if you're gonna benefit in society with, you know, the preferred, you know, social standing like why not? Why go out of your way to make it harder?

I find Evan’s take on this to be interesting. He is the only participant to make mention of this among the students of color in the class. The idea of “passing” within the non-White community is not uncommon (Dawkins, 2012), but Evan’s reference to it when simply

discussing the ethnic make-up of the class is unexpected. “There is more to this,” I memoed at the time, “could be related to his own identity and positioning? He talks about students both embracing and letting go of their ethnic identity. I’m sure he has had to face this himself coming from [SEMS]. Can he and does he play the White card when it is to his advantage??”

The exchange continues and I’m offered a little more insight into Evan’s mindset about his fellow students as he enters the classroom.

*So in your old class you were definitely a minority. So what about now?*

Now I think I'm still among the minority now that I think about it. I think in my AP lit class there's only like two to three people I can identify as Hispanic among like 30 something and my AP Bio class, yeah, my AP Bio class, there's not a lot too. My new AP US History is the most multiethnic group of students I've seen in an AP course.

*So when you go into classes, particularly when you started the school year, do you notice that you are one of a few?*

Yes, I very much do because I've always been, you know, raised to be socially conscious about things. Especially [be]cause my mom immigrated to this country when she was nine and she lived in Chicago so she was always like, you know, these are the people who you can identify with ethnically. If you make friends with them, you'll always have someone. And so that always taught me, like when I walk into a class, try to find someone who I can identify with ethnically and then, you know, obviously from there try to stem out so I'm not, you know, alone and feeling like “How am I going to do this with just, you know, no friendship support?”

Despite coming from a middle school in which he had to navigate being one of a few students of color, Evan seems to employ the same strategy that his SMMS counterparts use when initially entering the classroom. The others mention sitting together, Evan “tries to find someone who I can identify with ethnically,” all look to their racially/culturally alike peers for support in the class. Here, though, is where Evan diverges from his participant peers. He

does find that his experience at SEMS has afforded him the ability to bridge relationships within his AP classes.

I think for my teachers I'm pretty much viewed as kind of a rarity in some kind of way seeing as how I don't fit into those two kinds of groups. In our group discussion we talked about how in our AP classes, how you can see the racial groups...like segregating themselves in a kind of way and...they don't even know that they're doing it. It's not even until you realize like wait, why are all the Brown people on this side of the classroom? Like what happened? Like I literally was sitting next to a White person, then we were able to move seats and all of a sudden all the brown people are on one side and all the White people are on another. So I think with my teachers I'm viewed kind of rare because I'm right down that middle where it's like I can walk over to either group and be able to have a in depth academic conversation with either of them, while it's kind of hard for them to intertwine unless you know they've had a personal relationship outside of the class before getting into the class.

Evan, like his fellow participants, notices that the allowance of choice in seating facilitates the students' ability to segregate along racial lines. He also notes that it's hard for all of them to interact unless they've had a relationship outside of class. This again speaks to the need for teacher intervention, otherwise, as Evan points out its "all the brown people are on one side and all the White people are on another."

Evan, himself, however, believes he is able to bridge both sides. He discusses his perception of his peers' feelings about this.

My peers I think, I think some of them, oh this is going to sound like cocky. I think some of them are jealous of that capability that I have and kind of envious, and I think others are kind of grateful for it because in group discussions...I'm chosen to always start it off because people can kind of bounce ideas through me...I think I've been able to kind of become like a transmitter where it's like I can send signals to each side to be like, that comment was racist, that comment wasn't racist. Okay, let's bring it back in. Like, okay, what he meant was this, this and this. And what she meant was this, this and this. And you guys are both kind of saying the same thing. You guys are both agreeing with each other. So elaborate more on that. It comes in handy with classes that people don't really talk to each other especially cause of minority groups.

I find Evan's description to be somewhat comical, but not without depth. His feeling that he is a conduit between worlds is understandable. He entered into the high school with a majority White friend group from SEMS and was then placed into the cohorted QUEST program with a majority of Latinx/African American students from SMMS. He had to learn to navigate both worlds. He explains

In QUEST the White people in that program were actually pretty much the minority and I, if not all of them, knew most of them. And the few that were able to make relationships with the majority of Hispanic students were easy to get into conversations and academic discussions. But those that weren't kind of needed the push and you know they always kind of found their way towards me so that they could get a push.

This ability to straddle both worlds seems to benefit Evan in building relationships with peers. This switching between the two groups, though, makes me wonder if Evan fits fully into either? And how does this fluidity affect his positioning within the figured world? He has known most of his privileged, White peers since middle school, been in their classes, called them friend – does he enter the figured world of APUSH as their equal or does his race, his class, his connection to QUEST positioned him lower? Evan's own view of his identity plays a role in answering these questions.

*Academic and personal identity in the figured world.* Being a student of color in a predominately White academic environment has clearly shaped how Evan has approached his schooling. I learn as we talk, though, that his identity, and how he chooses to interact with others in class and out, extends far beyond middle school. In this first exchange, I look to get a sense of his positioning at SEMS.

*So as a student go as a student at SEMS where the majority of the population is privileged and the majority of the population is White. Where do you fit into that population?*

Honestly, I'm still trying to figure it out because at that school you were either White or you were ghetto...that kind of shone a very bad light on the ethnic communities. That I think caused the stigma between [SEMS] and [SMMS] because [SMMS] was the reputation of being like, "Oh they're all Mexican so they're all ghetto"...The White students there didn't know really what an ethnic person acted like and just at that point it was really when you're building your perception of the world. So they were like, "Oh let me think of the ghettoest perception that I can."

Evan notes that because the community was insulated the stereotypes and biases against students of color were pervasive. Moreover, because there were very few students of color in school, students were left to come up with their own views about what these students were like. He says, "it was the whole stigma of, you know, [SMMS] students were going to be these ghetto hoodlums who are poorly educated, which coming in my freshman year, being with predominantly [SMMS] students I learned that that was not the thing, but I know that there were still students on campus who had that idea planted in their mind."

On one hand, Evan spends his middle school years in this relatively insulated White and privileged environment, but then enters high school and becomes a member of an as insulated world of QUEST in which he is racially/ethnically similar, but culturally diverse.

For me with any and all of my ethnic friends, they have all mentioned multiple amounts of times that they consider me to be one of their Whitest friends or their White friend because um growing up, my mom was a single mom who, you know, had a very busy life who didn't really have a chance to give me, you know, kind of the ethnic background that she wished she could. I went to go spend summer with my three Cuban aunts down in Florida, which is pretty much like the Dominican Republic community, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, all in one. But for some reason it just didn't really stick with me. And I think that had to do with the fact that since me and my sister had two different dads and her dad is White and my dad is Mexican and my dad lived in Chicago and her dad lived in San Diego. I got a lot of experience with seeing that, as growing up as a perception. And especially since my sister – up until up until her last seven or eight years – was doing very well in life. I saw that as, Oh, if I can act as much culturally as she is, I'll do just fine and that kind of hurt me on

the long run because the attitudes I get from the Spanish speaking students is you're not brown enough to be around us. You're not Black enough to be around us. I've actually been told that by the president of the Black Student Union here. That she didn't want me at their Club Rush table because I wasn't Black enough and she wanted actual Black people there. And then I've been told by multiple Mexicans that like, you're one of the Whitest people I ever met, you must use salt for all your seasoning. And then with all of my friends who are White I'm pretty much the only interaction with an ethnic minority that they've had a close relationship with.

Evan truly is a young man in the middle, able to enter both groups, but I wonder if he is able to be a full member of either. He mentions his attempt to follow in his sister's footsteps whose father was White and I realize the connection to his earlier comment about students who are able to "play the White card." He says about his sister, "she kept her hair straight, makeup on, you know, hiding the aspects of her that could look a little bit Hispanic and so my mom saw that like, 'oh it's easy for one of my kids to do, why can't both kids do it?'" But Evan struggles to find a balance; he is unable or unwilling to fully integrate as his sister had done into the world of his White peers and he hears from the Latinx and African American community that he is not "brown enough...black enough to be around us." Socially, he has had to learn to navigate these two worlds.

I see myself when I'm hanging out with a White majority and you know, I start to kinda talk around how I do with like my ethnic friends where like, you know, I'm using Spanglish or I'm using certain terms that aren't quite familiar in English. And they're like, "What?" So I have to start talking more like eloquently and like proper. Then I go into a group of ethnic friends and I use a word like eloquently and they're like, "What does that mean?" Or like, "Why are you talking like you are the president of the United States making a speech right now? Just like talk normal." And I'm just like... It's kind of hard when you have to balance those two things. It's created a pressure on me at the same time that it's also created kind of a relief that I know that I can go into either and fit into either group. I don't just fit into one kind of stereotyped background so no one can really back me into a corner...People can call me White and I'm like, "No, like I know my culture." And I know my stuff and people can call me like extra Mexican.



Evan chooses to view his straddling of two worlds, ultimately, as a positive; recognizing that it allows him entrée into two diverse groups. I ask him if he has seen benefits in his academic life. He notes that by living in the privileged world of SEMS, he knows how to navigate among his teachers and fellow students.

Going into the class I'm always like, what is the teacher going to think of me? Because before they get to know me, they're going to see me first and you know, I'm this six foot, 245 brown boy who's like, you know, kind of, I've been told that I'm very intimidating by people. So you know, walking into a new class I always have to make sure that there's a smile on my face. I'm trying not to hold myself threateningly and that, you know, I kind of like put off a 'you can approach me vibe' otherwise, you know, I get the feeling they're going to think, "Oh no, it's just like another brown kid who's not going to do their work."

*How are your interactions with the predominately White students or Asian students in your AP classes?*

[W]hen it's like a predominantly White class, I normally get along and I think it's because, I don't know, besides physically I don't really fit the stereotype of a typical Hispanic man.

*What's the stereotype?*

Well you know that they're all going to have this like deep manly voice, like full facial hair that you know, they're all gonna be like rocking loose baggy pants and big t-shirts. And like a majority of the time when people meet me, they're not expecting, you know, like this person to be this flamboyant gay man who, you know, likes to do makeup and is very educated about himself and about topics socially. So I think when they kind of see that, they're like, "Oh my God, it's a wonder, it's a four leaf clover! Keep him, keep him around. We can use him as a reference when we need it."

*So do you think because you are a flamboyant gay man, does that make you more approachable?*

I definitely think it does...I've always been able to, you know, kind of ease my way in and always kind of had that, "Oh, we can lean on his shoulder." "He's like a quadruple minority if we keep him around; like we look like a good socially conscious person."

I see that Evan makes purposeful moves to fit into the figured world. He is a nontraditional character within the figured world of AP in numerous ways; but he has learned to play against type, if you will. He is an imposing figure, intimidating to some, as he points out. And yet, he adjusts his behavior to ensure that what his classmates and teachers perceive is far from their stereotypical vision of a Latinx male. He is confident and talkative in class, but makes sure that he is approachable. His voice is high, his motions soft, I note his attempts at an elevated level of academic vocabulary. He has created a new character in the figured world, and in doing so positions himself higher than other nontraditional students in the class. I wonder if the façade ever slips, if actions or the racialized curriculum in the APUSH class cause him to pick a side – and if so, how does he reconcile his connection to his racial and ethnic heritage with his academic persona?

*The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.* While much of my conversations with Evan discussed his straddling of two worlds, when the topic turned to the curriculum of APUSH, his opinions and values clearly reflected that of a student of color navigating an unsatisfying historical narrative. His views of the curriculum and how it was presented closely mirrored the other participants in the study.

[A]s a person of color who both, you know, shares an African American side and a Hispanic side, I feel like there's been nothing more than we're referred to as a group because it's very much like, uh, it's Rutherford B Hayes or like specific names of these activists and stuff like that. And then you get a generalized group of African American activists or Hispanic activists and you got the one, two or three who were able to stick out in their time period. But other than that it'll always refer to specific people in the White majority and be like, these people did Dah Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah, and the entire community of African Americans did Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah. And it's like, well obviously not the entire community was able to make the stride together. Otherwise I don't think the culture would be what the culture is now. Obviously it had to start with, you know, a group of people, small group of people, one person making a voice...

As with the other study participants, Evan notes a discrepancy in the historical presentation of the White majority and peoples of color. In this case he observes that the curriculum as presented chronicles the lives and actions of specific White men – they have names, stories, details – while people of color are represented as a generalized group. Oversimplified and broad, students are told the singular, conventional narrative of these groups, but are not privy to the individual stories that inform their full history. There is a perception too, that even in the limited presentation of these generalized events – slavery, immigration, the Jim Crow era – that there is little depth in what is offered.

I mean, you know, we talked about slavery, we've talked about, you know, the removal from Africa. We get like one to two sections per like five, and the whole like five-chapter section of slavery was you know, life was awful. It was awful. We were treated poorly. You didn't get food and then it was a whole bunch of like slavery was a cash crop...But none of it really went into like what slavery was like actually. It just kind of showed the effects of slavery on the economy. Other than that it was just a little bit of what it was like on the actual people who went through it.

*As a student of color what do you think of that?*

I think through the entire schooling system you kind of get just, you know, neutralized to it because all my education up into APUSH, like you know, it's always been like, okay, you get one month, one month and we're going to learn about the same three people and read the same book. And when that month's over we're back on – the book's over. So we're back on whatever we were learning about; whoever was new, White and in power.

Each of the participants has a similar view of this discrepancy in the history curriculum. It is a figurative and literal marginalization – a history told in margins, in pop-outs, in particular months – always separate from, but revolving around, as Evan describes as, “whoever was new, White, and in power.”

Within the APUSH class specifically, Evan notes, too, that the challenge lies not only in the curriculum, but in the presentation and activities that surround the curriculum. Students don't have the opportunity to move beyond surface level for most topics, and there is little time or impetus for students to go more in-depth on topics directly related to the record of non-White peoples in US History.

[I]t always has to tie back to either the colonists or the Americans. It'll always be like the Mexican American War – what effects did it have on White Americans in the north east? And you're like that's not where the Mexican American war took place. Like obviously it's going to damage their economy, but you have to focus on like the people in the south, like the African Americans who obviously, you know, didn't just sit around doing nothing during that time period. They had to do something. The Mexicans immigrating into the country had to do something. Even like the White people down there, it doesn't really focus on. It's just majority focusing on where the power point was in America – that history. I understand that's what you have to focus on because that's a critical part of the history, but there are so many things that you could go more in depth on and you know, give the students not only more knowledge that will be helpful for an AP exam, but you know, something that'll make them realize, oh, like this is actually what happened. It's not just something in a textbook; like this happened to real people. It wasn't just something that someone wrote about.

With an already quick pace that does not offer much time for in-depth discussion for much of the curriculum and the seeming discomfort of the teacher with racially sensitive topic as reported by other participants, Evan's reiteration of the lack of opportunity for dialogue during the presentation of racially/culturally sensitive curriculum does not come as a surprise. We discuss his perception of how teachers introduce and present these topics.

In history the teachers are always been very good to be like, okay, we're going to shut this down before it expresses like we're pressing the e stop button and we're not going any further. Obviously it's getting heated and touchy. Let's move on.

*Okay. Do the teachers ever acknowledge the sensitivity of the subject matter?*

I think they do. I think there are some teachers who just think, you know, we're just like overly socially [conscious] people nowadays, like teenagers are just so social about it. But then, you know, there are the teachers that realize, no, they (teenagers) are just growing more socially conscious...and they don't want to be numb to it, they want to, you know, feel what it is. So teachers will give you the warning and they will give a little talk where it's like, "This happened, it's gonna be sensitive for some of you; it might not be for others, but if it is sensitive for you and you need a breather or something or someone to talk to come up and say something, don't just, you know, sit there being like, 'they're talking about race and I'm feeling attacked let me go make a report.'" There is that essential caution sign. There's that bottom of a movie poster, it's R-rated because Dah Dah Dah Dah Dah Dah. Yes. It's not just like teachers are going into like, "and then we lynched him."

Evan's note here is the same sentiment given by his fellow participants. Their APUSH teacher, and Evan indicates most of his history teachers, give a warning prior to presenting racially sensitive topics. This "caution sign" is understandable, and yet, can also to be problematic when it stifles students' ability to have necessary conversations regarding the present-day implications of these events. It again feeds into the single narrative that students are presented regarding the people of color in the United States. This holds particular import as I take in Evan's comment regarding himself and his peers. He states that students are "growing more socially conscious...they want to, you know, feel what it is." This ability to deeply engage and "feel" comes not from the reading of a textbook or the notetaking of a lecture, but from critical examination and dialogue regarding events. What we have instead are students reacting to this curriculum as Evan describes below.

I think they just kind of tune out about it. I don't think any of them are really like, "oh man, that's awful. Like, oh my God. Oh. Like I'm heartbroken about it." I think they're just like, "Okay, this is the lesson." "Okay, he's going to go on about it." "Okay. Let's just, Okay. Okay. Okay." And then they just push that knowledge off until they can recall it...Like everyone is just like okay, let's get it over with, let's get it over with. So everyone's really just, you know, very lightly surfacing.

The surface level treatment of issues surrounding race within the collective history is discussed by all of the students; and all mention a preference for more in-depth engagement. This need, though, is not only an issue of the history curriculum; in fact, its influence spreads far beyond the classroom. At one point in our interview, Evan and I discussed if the larger civic discourse in society had an influence on the school environment. His comments on the overall culture of the school offer a fitting reminder of why dialogue with and among students is needed.

Obviously everyone on campus is not gonna agree politically... There have been many issues where people have posted on their social media very ignorant things that have gotten around campus very quickly. And they have had to make apologies to like the ethnic clubs that represent that ethnicity [be]cause the school wants them to grow out of that. They want them to be able to, you know, here's your opinion, I know you value it but maybe don't be so awful about it. And obviously there are people who take the whole sum of disagreeing with those topics way too far. I mean what are you going to do? There's not much you can do about it if that's how they're feeling.

Evan's statement, "they want them to be able to, you know, here's your opinion, I know you value it but maybe don't be so awful about it," strikes me as the reason we need our history and other teachers to be considerate but brave in their tackling of racially and culturally sensitive curriculum. There is a sense among the students I've interviewed that their teachers and the school at large are respectful of the racial and cultural differences that exist within the school. Each has said specifically that their APUSH teacher is caring and solicitous in general, and shows and expects a higher level of sensitivity when discussing racialized curriculum. It appears, though, that this raised level of concern limits the engagement and interaction that students have with the material. The result is a silent and compliant room with students waiting to "get it over with." It is an opportunity lost in the

APUSH classroom, but even more so, it is a lost opportunity at educating students in the civil discourse necessary to correct misconceptions, build understanding, and foster community.

Evan proved an atypical participant among a group of atypical AP students. His perceptions, values and beliefs, certainly colored by his time at SEMS and his personal story, diverged at times from the other four study participants. And yet, during their focus group interview when summarizing their experiences in the high school AP/Honors program and APUSH specifically, it was Evan's statement with which they all agreed.

In this high school specifically...we are taught that we are all under this idea of equality and that everyone on campus is equal and that we all get to have the same equal experience. But at the end of the day it's not what happens; but that's what is instilled in our minds from the first day we step on campus, that we will all get the equal opportunity to go for this. We will all get the equal opportunity to take those classes. We will all get the equal opportunity to do all of these things. But you know, for students who have a single parent household that have to go and walk 50 minutes a day to and from school, like if they don't have an understanding teacher or you know, compared to a person who has both parents or a stay at home mom that is able to, you know, stay after school, come in early before school to take the advantage of the resources were supplied; a lot of the nontraditional students, especially the ethnic minorities have a harder time being able to access the resources, but they are all given to us. It's just a matter of fact that we have extra obstacles in our way of utilizing them. We all get equal opportunity for access and success, but we don't necessarily have the same chance to take advantage of them.

## Summary

This chapter explored the narratives of five nontraditional students of color entering into the elite academia of high school honors/Advanced Placement courses and navigating the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History. Over a period of five months they revealed their stories through a series of interviews and journals presented as individual case studies; their voices recounting thoughts and perceptions about the interactions, people, and programs that influenced their experiences.

From their stories I came to learn that in Advanced Placement United States History, nontraditional students both positioned themselves and were positioned as separate, other, and ultimately, lower, than their privileged, White peers. Their belief about their own AP student identities and their beliefs of how others viewed them as AP students was inextricably tied to earlier high school and middle school academic experiences. The students noted that middle school, in particular, could set the trajectory for entrée into or avoidance of high school honors/AP programs. These largely homogenous neighborhood schools with enrollment largely determined by socio-economic status and in turn race and culture, affected their perceived level of preparation for and encouragement into subsequent high school honors and/or AP courses. However, targeted and specific recruitment into honors/AP programming and embedded academic and social support upon entering high school – like the QUEST program – mitigated perceived gaps in middle school preparation.

In addition to overall school efforts to support their transition into and through honors and AP, I learned from students that individual teacher moves within the class significantly influenced how these students engaged with alike peers, traditional AP students, and even the curriculum. When given the option, unintentionally or not, by the teacher, nontraditional



students segregated and silenced themselves in their AP US History class due to their own beliefs about their academic preparation and abilities in relation to their privileged peers.

This sense of separation extended to the curriculum, where students found themselves disengaged from a history narrative that they believed presented an incomplete, singular account of people of color in the development of the United States. Students commended the teacher for acknowledging that some material presented could be sensitive, but also noted that most material related to peoples of color was given limited time in comparison to the chronicling of White, privileged men within the country's history. When racially/culturally sensitive topics were presented, they were highly regulated by the teacher and offered little opportunity for discussion or expansion, something that the students indicated they would have preferred. This limited representation both in the text and activities of the APUSH class of people of color in general, and Latinx and African American people specifically, placed students in the margins of history and on the periphery of the classroom.

The combined stories of these young people painted a picture of their emergent invitation and acceptance into the figured world of AP; mitigated, and sometimes hindered, by past experiences and current interactions with the actors and environment of said world.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### **Introduction**

Chapter four presented the individual case studies of five eleventh grade Latinx and Afro-Latinx students participating in Advanced Placement United States History. Because of their racial and socio-economic background, they are generally considered non-traditional students in the elite academic world of Advanced Placement. This study examined how these students' personal and academic identities interacted with their teacher, their privileged peers, and the curriculum to influence their entrée into, positioning within, and engagement in the course. Emergent from the study was the importance of previous academic experiences and supports in students' navigation of Advancement Placement. The students were encouraged to speak freely about their perceptions in multiple interviews and a series of journals; in doing so they offered insights into the factors that helped and hindered non-traditional students' access and success in Advancement Placement programs. The study aims to bring student voice to the forefront of educational research surrounding secondary students of color, further developing the awareness and empathy of building and district educators, educational organizations, and publishers of instructional materials to the unique needs of these diverse students.

### **Overview of the statement of the problem**

The research supporting the importance of high school programming in the entrance and persistence of students into higher education is dense and varied (Ndura, Robinson & Ochs, 2003; Swanson, 2008; Long, Conger & Iatarola, 2012), with several studies directly noting the importance of AP courses specifically in the college admissions process (Lawrence, 1996; Hebel, 1999; Attewell, 2001; Santoli, 2002; Rigol, 2003; Geiser &

Santelices, 2004; Hacsí, 2004; Sadler & Tai, 2007; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009). With typically smaller class sizes, more experienced teachers, and students with stronger academic backgrounds, those taking AP courses benefit from a perceived and actual AP advantage in both high school and subsequent higher education endeavors (Shaw, Marini & Mattern, 2013). Traditionally, however, there has been a significant gap within the make-up of students who enroll and succeed in AP courses. Despite the recognition of the import of AP coursework to future academic effort, the exponential national and international growth of the AP program across school districts, and dedicated efforts by educational and government entities to increase the number of students entering the AP program, Black and Latinx students are significantly less likely to enroll in AP classes. Importantly, when accounting for similar academic preparation, Black and Latinx students disproportionately enroll less, take fewer associated exams, and score lower than their White and Asian peers (College Board, 2018). The phenomenon exists across AP courses (with a singular exception of AP Spanish Language and Culture in which Hispanic students both out-enroll and out-score White and Asian students) and has presented researchers with ample questions related to these students' lack of enrollment and lack of success within the program. A problem connected to students of color, the various issues associated with race and ethnicity have been identified as primary influences in the academic achievement gaps between Black and Latinx students and their White peers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solorzano, et al., 2000; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005; Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013).

Research exists to support why students of color are failing to enroll in AP courses at the same rate as their White and Asian peers; less so, however, exists that discusses these

students' experience while enrolled in AP class, thus limiting our understanding of the elements that interact to hinder their engagement and achievement in class and in the subsequent national AP exam. Moreover, when studies do offer insight into the classroom experience of students, the research presents us with a third person view of events; this study aimed to give voice and authority to the students who were actively engaged in the work, allowing us to learn first-hand their immediate perceptions and beliefs about their interactions within the class.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explored five Latinx and Afro-Latinx students who had entered into the particularly complex world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH). Nationally and locally APUSH is consistently among the top five in student enrollment across races and ethnicities; at the same time, it covers content that has the potential to be problematic for groups that have historically been marginalized and mistreated. The student participants offered insights not only into their perceptions about their interactions as non-traditional students in an AP classroom, but they further detailed their experiences when presented with sensitive curriculum related to the checkered birth and development of the United States. The research focused on how their experiences shaped their academic identity, how they were positioned and positioned themselves within the class as a result of their academic identity, and how their interactions with their teacher, their traditional and non-traditional peers, and the curriculum influenced their engagement and achievement within the class.

## Summary and Discussion of Findings

The study examined the overarching research question, in what ways, if any, do non-traditional students of color perceptions about their identity and position within the figured world of AP United States History affect their learning and engagement with the class? To fully explore this question, the following related sub-questions were considered:

1. What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do non-traditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within the academically rigorous figured world?
2. What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement?
3. In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?

Although each case presented a unique student experience; five themes emerged across the cases that helped to address the aforementioned questions:

*I never got pushed* – The importance of middle school expectations and preparation;

*Hand holding* – The role of school provided supports;

*I don't feel like it's on purpose or anything* – Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning;

*I feel like an AP student that doesn't belong* – Academic and personal identity in the figured world; and

*But what about me?* – The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.

The following section summarizes the findings related to the five themes and concludes with ways the themes offer insights into the aforementioned research questions.

***I never got pushed: Middle school expectations and preparation.*** Within their stories, all five participants in the study noted middle school experiences that influenced their future endeavors into and through the Advanced Placement program. While not enrolled in the same classes, SMMS students recalled similar occurrences that they believed left them less ready to face academically rigorous courses in high school. For SMMS, with a largely low income and Latinx population, students perceived that their school did not stress or encourage students to take honors courses, at times, even seeming to hinder the process. The four student participants believed that the lack of communication regarding honors classes and the subsequent requirements to enter – locating the honors request sheet, asking for advisement from the teacher outside of class-time, receiving a teacher signature to sign-off on the following year’s honors placement, and turning in the signed document to the appropriate staff – made participation in their middle school honors program more difficult; if they did not actively advocate for themselves, as was the case with Joseph, they would not have enrolled. Notably, the cases at SMMS contrasted significantly from the SEMS experience presented by Evan, who felt overly pressured to enroll in the middle school honors program at his school. He believed that honors participation at the largely White, largely high-income school, was pushed by the overall school community and, despite his negative opinion that the environment created an atmosphere of “school first, life later” and contributed to “a lot of burnout,” he acknowledged that students “know the opportunities and know the pathways to take them.”

For the student participants, the differences in the ability to access and enroll in middle school honors courses was a significant influence in a student's subsequent enrollment in high school honors programming. Their beliefs – that SEMS students were more compelled to enter into high school honors programming than their SMMS peers – seem to bear out in the numbers. In the 2016/2017 school year when the student participants entered ninth grade, of the 502 students enrolled in Honors English 9, 80 were from SMMS – approximately 22% of the 350 students that matriculated in total from SMMS. This is compared to the 400 students from SEMS enrolled in Honors English 9, approximately 68% of the 615 total students entering from there.

Notably, though, whereas the students may have differed on their experiences in accessing honors courses in middle school, the four participants who did take at least one middle school honors course indicated that there was little in the middle school courses that prepared them for the rigors of high school honors and AP courses. Regardless of the middle school attended, the participants acknowledged a disparity in the notion of “rigor” at each level. Characterized mainly as more and faster work, what qualified as honors programming in middle school did little to prepare them for the analytical and literacy demands of high school.

The idea of being “pushed” in middle school, both in terms of participation in honors and in relation to academic demands of the tasks presented in the courses, was an important factor for students in their belief about their ability to successfully enter and navigate the world of high school honors and AP. For them, this seeming lack of preparation, highlighted the import of a range of supports for students as they entered rigorous courses in high school.

***Hand holding: The role of school provided supports.*** All of the student participants were alumni of the QUEST program, which in itself appears to have been the most significant support all five of the students received in their preparation for entrance into and navigation of Advanced Placement courses in high school. Serving as an academic and social support, the program offered SMMS students invitation into a world in which they may not initially have felt they belonged, offering students the opportunity to expand their beliefs about their academic identity; and allowing them to see themselves as honors and AP students.

The QUEST program and its cohort model allowed the teachers within these courses to temporarily disrupt one of the primary difficulties that students of color face when navigating courses in which they have traditionally been under-represented, namely, the sense of isolation and otherness (Banner-Haley, 2010; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). Because all of the students had been recruited in and all were neophytes to these academically elite worlds, within the QUEST cohort, students entered their first high school honors course and their first AP course more equally positioned than if they had entered traditional honors/AP spaces.

As a universal support, the five participants appreciated the role the QUEST program played in helping them transition into high school honors and AP programs; but some participants also believed it stunted their ability to move outside of the comfort zone of their alike peers to interact with others, ultimately, making it more difficult to relate to privileged peers when they moved out of the cohort and into the traditional APUSH class. Academically, too, students wondered if their cohorted AP World class was as rigorous as the non-QUEST class taken by other students, with the supports offered in the class seen by some as “hand-holding” that didn’t prepare them for APUSH. The students alluded to the necessary



balance between the building of self-confidence and the building of academic skills. There was a need for both in order for them to successfully enter and interact within the academically elite figured world of APUSH. All prefaced their thoughts regarding the program with comments like “she was a great teacher”, “they supported us”, but also noted that what they regarded as leniency may have ultimately given them unrealistic expectations about their preparation for entry into the APUSH. This may be reflected in their overall performance on the national AP World exam with all five students earning a C or higher in the class, but only one out of the five earning a passing score of 3 on the exam.

Whereas these first two themes evolved primarily from the students’ accounts prior to entering APUSH and speak to the students’ preparation for entry into that figured world, the remaining three themes emerged from students’ recollections of their experience within the APUSH class itself.

***I don’t feel like it’s on purpose or anything: Teacher moves, student actions, and classroom positioning.*** The confidence with which the student participants entered into APUSH and how they positioned themselves appeared partially dependent on their perceptions of the demographic make-up of the class, with those who perceived themselves as minorities within the class self-segregating. The students’ physical placement in the room reflected their positioning in the figured world, in which they attained entrée but not equal positioning within the APUSH class. Without intervention from the teacher, the students spoke only to those alike peers with whom they had self-selected to interact. They noted that because their teacher allowed choice in the seating arrangement and often in small group activities, they opted to self-segregate due to discomfort and/or fear of interacting with non-alike peers. Because status and position in the figured world is tied to the interactions that

take place within it (Holland et. al, 1998, Urrieta, 2007), the allowance of self-segregation within student choices limited their opportunity to interact and grow with each other. Students remained static characters – representations of a type – ranked and regarded accordingly.

For the participants, their separation from the traditional students within the class was evidenced not only by a physical separation. During whole class discussion, the teacher's choice of calling on volunteers limited the participation of the study participants. The participants recognized that their own fear and discomfort had them participating less and positioning themselves lower in the class. They also, though, sensed that their teacher treated them differently – called on them less, accepted minimal answers, did not demand correct answers – because of their status and positioning, an unconscious reaction that researchers studying teachers of minority students have long noted (Mingle, 1978; Wilson, 1981; Wong, 1980, Trujillo, 1986).

The unconscious moves that influenced the experience of the non-traditional students extended beyond the teacher. The participants recognized behaviors by their peers – ignoring, talking over – that positioned them lower in the class or indicated to them that their peers ranked them as a lower status in the figured world; but they were not willing to assign purposeful malintent to their actions. The teacher's failure to curb privileged students' control of the academic conversation and the lack of intentional and accountable participation of non-traditional students yielded a power dynamic in which privileged, White students' high status was accepted and elevated, while non-traditional students of color remained relegated to outsider status – a part of, but not full participants in the figured world.

The student participants' acceptance of this lower position was as much a result of their own beliefs about their academic identities as it was the result of their in-class interactions with their teachers and traditional peers.

***I feel like an AP student that doesn't belong: Academic and personal identity in the figured world.*** The study participants entered into the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History holding onto insecurities connected to their personal and academic identities. Those in classes in which they were a minority looked to alike peers – those with similar racial and cultural backgrounds – for safety and comfort, often silencing themselves and relegating themselves to the physical margins of the room. They shied away from both speaking and interacting with White privileged peers because they believed these traditional members of the world held negative assumptions about them, and if they were to speak and be wrong, they would be found out as veritable AP imposters. All five believed that their racial/ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds defined their personal identities and in turn, that their personal identities shaped how they viewed and how others perceived their academic identities. And all five viewed themselves as non-traditional within the figured world of APUSH, recognizing their race, culture, socio-economic status, and familial circumstance as contributors to this definition. Each revealed a level of insecurity because of this status that affected their general behavior in school and how they chose to position themselves in APUSH specifically.

Each of the participants as a student of color in this academically elite figured world was in a state of constant negotiation. As CRT studies note, students must not only work to maintain good academic standing while maneuvering the conflicts arising from disparaging perceptions of them; but must also navigate through a myriad of pejorative racial stereotypes

that fuel the creation and perpetuation of racial microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). As I learned from the participants, this effect was heightened in the APUSH class as they were presented with the checkered narrative of the birth of the nation.

***But what about me: The incomplete history and singular story of APUSH.*** The choice of the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History as the primary arena of this study was two-fold. First, APUSH has consistently high enrollment locally and nationwide. During the time of the study, APUSH was second in enrollment only to AP Government at SMHS. Secondly, the racially and culturally sensitive curriculum presented in the APUSH course had the potential to be particularly challenging for students of color.

More so than any other topic discussed in the study, the student participants had a singular, and clear, opinion about the curriculum presented in their class. While all student participants expressed appreciation for their teacher, they also voiced varying levels of frustration with the content of the APUSH curriculum. There was a sense among them all that they were receiving a history of White America, a history not necessarily their own (Almarza & Fehn, 1998; Epstein, 2000). During my time with them, I asked each student if they felt that the APUSH curriculum gave them a complete historical picture. Joseph summed up the students' perceptions when he noted that "the whole year we haven't really talked about any other groups except White Americans or like White Americans going to war against this group or this group." This notion of all tracks leading back to those White and in power – that there was a limited perspective on people of color – frustrated the students. And this singular storyline in which people of color were relegated to limited categorizations – the immigrant, the slave, the rioter – left students disengaged from the curriculum.

The historical accounts in which people of color were discussed were largely the sensitive curriculum areas – the students mentioned slavery, Jim Crow laws, Japanese internment, and early immigration laws to name a few. Students noted and appreciated that their teacher introduced this type of content with a warning that the topics were serious, but noted also a discomfort or “vibe” as Angelica named it, during the presentation of the topics. The students had little chance to hear or voice reactions to this sensitive material, as their teacher both highly controlled the what and how of what was presented and also, as noted by the students, moved through said content quickly. Some of the speed students chalked up to the overall surface level coverage of much of the material simply to make it through all the content needed for the AP exam; but others perceived a clear, purposeful limitation on the amount of time spent on material related to people of color within the historical narrative.

### **Conclusions and Connections to the Research Questions**

Each of the five themes that emerged from the student narratives helped to offer insights into the overarching research question and its sub-questions.

*Sub-Question One: What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do non-traditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within an academically rigorous figured world?* The theme of **middle school expectations** (theme 1) set the stage for understanding student participants’ beliefs about their academic identities and their interactions within the figured world of APUSH. Students believed that the expectations of honors enrollment set forth in their respective middle schools either served as an onramp or blockade on the road to academically rigorous coursework in high school. Students at SMMS, largely Latinx within a low socioeconomic community, generally had to advocate for themselves and overcome

institutionalized barriers in order to enter into the middle school honors program while Evan, the sole student from the largely White, high income SEMS believed that the school community's hyper focus on honors created an expectation of student enrollment in honors both in middle school and high school. Where they attended middle school either helped or hindered students' budding academic identities, including their desire to enter into and their beliefs about their abilities to be successful in high school honors and AP programming.

For these five students, the middle school experience and its influence on entry into high school honors and AP programming was mitigated by the QUEST program, **a school provided support** (theme 2) aimed at building students' perceptions of their academic identities and their beliefs about themselves as students capable of entering and being successful in honors and AP. The cohorted program recruited students into the academically rigorous world of high school honors with the goal of increasing students' academic skills and self-concept of themselves as members belonging in an academically elite community. Students appreciated the ability to be with like peers as they entered into honors in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Additionally, they believed that the components of the program and particularly the attitudes of their QUEST teachers helped to build their confidence related to their academic identities. Students did note, however, that the cohort model, which worked as a year one transition, served to hinder their growth in year two, particularly as they reflected on their entry into non-QUEST AP courses in their junior. While they appreciated their teacher's ongoing belief in them and the flexibility she showed, they felt the QUEST AP World class did not sufficiently prepare them for the academic rigors ahead, and that the cohort model segregated them from the White, privileged peers that they would later come into contact with. As a result, the

program which helped their academic identities in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, served to hinder them when they transitioned out of the program and into APUSH in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Their reflection on this transition and their interactions in APUSH helped to inform my thinking around the remaining research sub-questions:

*Sub-Question 2: What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement?*

*Sub-Question 3: In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?*

As students entered into APUSH their **interactions with their teacher and peers** (theme 3) affected how they positioned themselves and were positioned in the class. When students entered into a traditionally figured world of APUSH – majority White, Asian, and privileged – actions by the teacher played an important role in their positioning. When given the choice by the teacher, student participants self-segregated to sit with like peers, and when the teacher gave a choice in voluntary participation, student participants chose to self-silence by not raising their hands, or avoided answering by stating “I don't know.” These actions by the students affected how they were viewed by and their interactions with their privileged peers. Students admitted that they segregated and silenced themselves because they perceived their peers and their teacher would think they were not as smart or that they did not belong in the class. Their actions ultimately became a sort of Catch 22 – they positioned themselves lower because they believed that they were seen as neophytes and outsiders, and they were positioned lower and treated as outsiders because they placed themselves on the margins of

the class. Although they had been prepared for and had matriculated into APUSH from AP World, they questioned their place; they were **AP students that wondered if they belonged** (theme 4). Of note for educators is that this questioning seemed to be lessened if students were part of a more diverse APUSH classroom, as was the case with Carlos who did not feel as if he were a minority in the class and who ended the year not only stating that he had made a friend network in the class, but also expressing that he felt “like a traditional AP student.”

Lastly, regardless of their teacher’s or their peer’s treatment of them, and regardless of whether the APUSH class enrollment was traditional or more diverse, all of the students perceived that the curriculum of the course served to marginalize and rank them as a lower status within the figured world. Acknowledging that privileged, White men would play prominently in US History curriculum, students still expressed discontent at the way peoples of color were portrayed and presented within the course curriculum. They appreciated that their teacher prefaced sensitive curriculum with admonitions for respectful behavior, but noted a palpable discomfort among the class community when this material was presented. Participants noted that little time was spent on the historical narrative that involved people of color, particularly Latinx peoples, and when it was, it was generally a monolithic view that, in the students’ opinion, supported rather than dispelled stereotypical views of them. The students, most of whom identified as wholly Mexican or Mexican American, were especially vocal; expressing that the only reason they were in the book was “for immigration.” They dutifully studied content for which they felt little connection and noted that their initial interest in the class waned as they faced the continuous singular storyline that foregrounded White, privileged men. Having been stifled during times when material related to people of color was presented and being disengaged from the traditional historical narrative that was



presented, students asked “**but what about me and my people?**” (theme 5) – communicating feelings of marginalization, isolation, and bias when discussing the curriculum. Their interaction with what they viewed as a one-sided text, their teacher’s overly cautious presentation of the racially/culturally sensitive material, and their privileged peers’ “get it over with” attitude during these same times made them feel as much an “other” when interacting with the curriculum as they did when interacting with privileged, White peers in the class.

### **Implications**

Listening to the student voices within the study, there are implications that stakeholders in the educational community can reflect upon as they consider the experiences of non-traditional students within the world of honors and AP generally, and Advanced Placement United States History specifically.

**Implications for Classroom Teachers.** As more non-traditional students of color enter the world of Advanced Placement teachers can help to mitigate the barriers these students face to full inclusion in and equal positioning within the classes they navigate. These aids range from simple shifts in teaching practice to more in-depth examination of pedagogy, purpose, and personal biases.

As the participants noted, in classes in which they were a minority, their insecurities regarding their academic status manifested in a physical separation from and self-silencing within the class. When given the choice by the teacher, they self-segregated with like peers along the margins of the class, interacting only with each other unless forced to do otherwise. Similarly, when faced with participating in whole class discussions, they chose either non-participation – no hand-raising/volunteering – or, when called upon, avoidance – “I don’t

know.” The student participants advocated for less choice in both arenas, first calling for teachers to purposefully choose seats and groups for students to ensure that they integrate and talk with non-alike peers. In a similar vein, students noted that allowing volunteers in class discussions resulted in the same students – usually White and privileged – dominating the conversation. Again, purposeful and strategic calling on students and the establishment of participation norms (No “I don’t know” Zones, sentence starters, academic conversation starters, etc.) allows for varied participation and can give non-traditional students the impetus and support to contribute their thinking to the class. These are “low hanging fruit”, if you will, in the world of classroom teaching – minor tweaks to allow for greater integration and interaction among students.

Students also spoke specifically of their appreciation of their teachers who acknowledged the diverse group of students with whom they taught and who offered some level of flexibility to help students meet the challenges of the AP course. The participants did not want an easing of requirements and certainly did not want any special treatment; however, teachers can consider a general approach which offers universal supports for all students, establishing an environment, as Angelica noted, in which non-traditional students “will have the confidence to actually take [the] resources and put them into place.” These could include accommodation with deadlines, ability to retake tests, and multiple opportunities for extended help both within and outside of the school day. Students specifically mentioned appreciation for having access to multiple opportunities for tutoring; Angelica especially valued tutoring as a requirement in her AP World class. Teachers, though, should consider the role that tutoring outside of the classroom plays and the access that all students have to benefit from it. Is tutoring an opportunity for additional help, or is it a necessary component to succeed in the

class? Teachers should note both the number and the make-up of students attending sessions and modify in-class and outside of class supports accordingly. Is it a large number of students? Is it a racially and socio-economically diverse group of students? Large numbers of students needing additional help is an indication of a need for an adjustment in tier one instruction; there are learning gaps to address in the daily instruction. If the group is not diverse, teachers will need to determine the “who” and the “what”? Who is coming and what is the nature of the help that they are receiving? A homogenous group of privileged, traditional students accessing extra help may be an equity issue – have these traditional students figured out the key to the class’ success and, in turn, do tutoring times accommodate and allow all students to participate? A homogenous group of non-traditional students triggers additional questions regarding in-class instruction. What needs are not being met for non-traditional students within the classroom that would compel them to attend outside tutoring in large numbers?

Students called for an environment that was both comfortable and challenging; they indicated a sense of accomplishment when they achieved in classes that they knew were rigorous, and bristled at the courses that were academically rigorous in name only. They sensed when teachers believed in them and when they didn’t, and did not want a “hollow” grade that did not deserve the honors and/or AP distinction. It is a call from students for their teachers to critically examine the “what” and “why” of the pedagogical choices they make. Implicit biases can as easily cause teachers to treat students with too much leniency as too rigidly. The students called for challenge within their courses and wanted to be academically pushed with appropriate supports. They recognized when they were being treated differently, for example the differences in the activities of the QUEST AP World class and the traditional

AP World class or being allowed to be a non-participator and avoider in class discussion; and as a result, students questioned the motives of their teacher's differing expectations. It is important for teachers to recognize the biases that they bring into the classroom and to be intentional in setting out to mitigate them. Teachers must ask themselves, am I calling more on some students than others? Am I modifying and/or lowering academic expectations rather than maintaining high standards with appropriate supports? Carlos issues a fitting call for teachers of non-traditional students, "I feel like [teachers need] to push your students even if they don't like it at the time because it will help them realize that they could do it."

APUSH teachers, in particular, face a daunting task of moderating their own biases while managing potentially racially and culturally sensitive course content. The larger implications of this study for College Board and its course curriculum will follow in this section, however, teachers of APUSH, as the primary adults with whom these students interact daily, must come to their course with an understanding of the needs of a more diverse student population and a plan to address the content and skills necessary for all students – non-traditional and traditional alike – to authentically engage with and learn from interactions with the content and each other. The content of APUSH introduces moments in the historical narrative in which students and teachers must confront the realities of how race has been used to systematically oppress and marginalize people of color. The instructional choices teachers make in the presentation of this subject matter is important for both students of color and their privileged, White peers. By engaging students in critical scholarship and civil discourse, teachers have the opportunity to not only build students' knowledge of the historical record, but, more importantly, grow in all students the ability to engage in the critical conversations necessary to build understanding and empathy among each other. The student participants

within this study welcomed the opportunity to engage in discourse around these racially/culturally sensitive topics with their peers, but were given little chance to do so. Their teacher was respectful to the point of reverence, and students could palpably feel the discomfort in the room – they and their peers, they noted, “just wanted to get through it.” It is an unfortunate irony, for the attempt to protect these students of color, once again relegated them and their stories to the sidelines. The historical accounts became something to get through rather than something to learn from; thus, missed learning opportunities for both students of color and their White peers. Learning opportunities that matter in the short and long term, for unless students – privileged, White students in particular – begin to grapple with and learn from the implications of a nation birthed, nurtured, and propagated on the backs of and through the systematic subjugation of peoples of color, the institutionalized racist practices that favor some and suppress others shall remain firmly entrenched within the fabric of the country. As such, to address these moments fully and engage students deeply, teachers must have the mettle and the skill to navigate students through the analysis and discussion these moments in history require and deserve. For teachers, though, the ability to introduce and facilitate these difficult conversations does not come naturally, as evidenced by the participants’ knowledgeable, skilled, and well-intentioned APUSH teacher. Unless purposefully sought out, many teachers have had little training and/or practice in participating in, let alone managing, these courageous and critical conversations. It is a need that rests not with teachers alone, though; for without foundational education during teacher training programs and continuing preparation and support in this arena from district and site leadership, teachers are left to go it alone with mixed, at best, results.

**Implications for Educational Leaders.** If teachers are committed to the day to day work with students, site and district administrators are responsible for the institutional policies and practices that either help or hinder non-traditional student success in academically rigorous coursework like Advanced Placement.

There was a clear distinction between student experiences among those who were in diverse APUSH classes and those who were a part of a small group within a classroom of majority traditional students. As the controllers of the school master schedule, site administrators should work to ensure, to the best extent possible, equitable distribution of students among classes. With that said, the more non-traditional students that are in AP programs, the greater the likelihood of a more diversified student body within these classes. To that end, school administrations must actively work together to put systems in place that prepare students for AP participation, that invite students into honors and AP programs, and that support them throughout the time that they are there. A vertically articulated system is a crucial piece of the puzzle. Students within this study were clear that the middle school experience served as barrier or launch pad to the high school honors/AP program. As clear was that access to and expectation of enrollment in honors was highly dependent on the middle school that students attended. Students at the Title One, largely Latinx school were given minimal encouragement to and little direction of how to enroll in honors classes. In fact, students had to advocate for themselves – proactively going to the school office to ask about the steps to enter, locating forms, and getting teacher permission to enroll in courses. If students did not actively do this work, they, as Joseph noted about his own experience, were left out of the loop, uninformed and uninspired to take courses of which they were academically capable of entering. Administrators must work to ensure that honors enrollment

processes are transparent, available, and equitably promoted to all students and families in a variety of ways. And as importantly, school leaders must set the tone of academic risk taking, ensuring that teachers are encouraging students in their classes to challenge themselves in rigorous coursework, and actively recruiting students into honors programming. At the same time, the coursework that students take in middle school must, in fact, be challenging and intellectually respectful to students. School leaders at the high school and middle school level should work to open the communication between their teachers and create opportunities for high school and middle school teachers to align their pedagogy and expectations. As Kate notes, “I feel like teachers should actually start enforcing those rules that happen in high school and not just like treat that class setting as a middle school class setting. I think they should treat it as a high school class setting where it’ll actually give kids insight...”

The transition from middle school into high school honors, while not required for later AP enrollment, was seen as an important step for the participants in their comfort and perceived readiness for APUSH. The students noted that the QUEST program in particular gave them the confidence to enter into Advanced Placement courses when they otherwise would not have. As school leaders look to increase access and success for non-traditional students into academically rigorous coursework, the QUEST program can serve as a successful model. Key components include the “reaching down” into the middle schools to recruit/invite students, particularly those that had not signed up for 9<sup>th</sup> grade honors, into the program. Administrators from the high school personally presented and talked to students and a separate invitation only meeting was held for parents of recruited students. The QUEST program itself had academic and leadership goals for students, and as such, administrators strategically selected teachers that were willing to embed culturally sustaining teaching

practices into their instruction and provided professional development in this area to build their capacity. Students noted that their teachers helped to build their academic skills, and also taught them about navigating in a privileged world of the academic elite; by addressing both, the program aided students in the building of social capital helping to ease their entrée into classroom spaces in which students of privilege hold and benefit from an abundance of longstanding social networks and economic resources (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The cohort model of the program created bonds among the students; Kate and Angelica noted and appreciated the family atmosphere of the group. However, a word of caution regarding the cohort model was also voiced by students who raised concerns about two years of segregation from privileged peers. A single year approach would offer the benefits of a transition program while still allowing students the opportunity to learn to build relationships and interact with privileged peers before their junior year where many often begin their AP careers.

A last note for high school administrators attempting to open access to Advanced Placement courses to non-traditional students was expressed by students during their focus group interview. Universally the students recognized and appreciated the attempts by the school to increase the number of non-traditional students entering into the AP arena. They noted AP Ambassadors, a group of non-traditional students in Advanced Placement courses that were student ambassadors to help in recruitment efforts. For example, they invited non-traditional students to AP information nights, and talked to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and their parents about the benefits of Advanced Placement. They were used in a limited capacity, however, and students noted that they had less cachet than other student groups on campus. In particular, the students compared the AP Ambassadors to the Excalibur Knights (EK – students with the highest GPAs in the senior class) who visited the middle schools to



encourage academically rigorous coursework. The participants perceived that the EKs, who were overwhelmingly White and Asian, were held in higher esteem, as evidenced by professional pictures hung in what they believed to be a place of honor in the school's student union. Though the AP Ambassadors received similar pictures that were placed in the union, the students perceived they were separate from, and thus, less than. As an administrator at the school for the inception of the AP Ambassadors, this was a lesson in intentionality and sensitivity for me. On one hand, the AP Ambassadors served their intended purpose beautifully – they were non-traditional students of color who were enrolled in and were succeeding in AP courses; they looked like and could relate to the students with whom we wanted to extend invitation into the Advanced Placement program. We had their photos taken, purchased them AP Ambassador shirts and jackets, and utilized them to speak to our non-traditional students and their parents. In most ways, they paralleled their EK counterparts. And yet, as the student participants eluded to, parallel was not the same; parallel was separate; and in their eyes, separate was not as prestigious, not as important, and not as valued as the established EK program. Despite all intentions pointing to the opposite, they had once again become “othered” – students on the margins. As an administrator, it was important for me to hear from students that sometimes the best of our intentions clash with the reality of our students' perceptions. It was yet another reminder of the importance of student voice as we work to improve their academic experiences. As educational leaders we aim to make decisions with the best for students in mind, and yet, students are often far removed from the decision-making process. Our determinations – even our most well-intentioned ones – far too often are formulated in long meetings in small rooms with adults who've read about and talked amongst themselves about what best for students. To what extent, though, have we

given students a seat at the table? And how diverse is that representation? In 2018 the state of California amended its education law 35012 related to school board membership to read, “A pupil member shall be seated with the members of the governing board of the school district and shall be recognized as a full member of the governing board at the meetings, including receiving all materials presented to the board members and participating in the questioning of witnesses and the discussion of issues.” At the school level as well, the California education code requires students as members of secondary School Site Councils, a body that oversees the implementation of the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Both are recognitions that the decisions we make in the educational lives of our students, require their voice to be heard. District and site leaders should ask themselves, have students been included on leadership teams, been a part of faculty meetings, shared in conversations regarding curriculum and class offerings? Ultimately, as leaders, are we making decisions for students or with students? As I have seen from the study participants, they have much to offer and we have much to learn from their viewpoints.

**Implications in the broader arena: College Board.** In creating a platform in this study to give voice to students regarding their experience in the world of Advanced Placement, particularly Advanced Placement United States History, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the participants’ discontent with the curriculum and text of their APUSH course. This coincides with the literature exploring the relationship that students of color have with the traditional U.S. History curriculum (Almarza & Fehn, 1998; Epstein, 1998, 2000; DiLorenzo, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Banks, 2008; Epstein, Mayorga & Nelson, 2011; Martell, 2013). Universally student participants noted that the text and the storylines presented foregrounded a male, Eurocentric experience and

promoted stereotypical, singular depictions of people of color. The students recognized this to be a problem both of content and of presentation; some of which their teacher controlled and some of which, they felt, was a limitation of the course itself. To be fair, the students understood that they were enrolled in a United States History course, and had realistic expectations of the curriculum, with Kate expressing, “I would have liked like Chicano studies more mixed up into there, but I knew it wasn’t going to be that way because it’s called AP US History not AP Mexican History, that’s another class for another day.” As a group of primarily Latinx students, though, they expressed dismay at what they saw as the mono-thematic view of their race/culture. In separate interviews they noted, “the only times I learned about my background is when it comes to like statistics and my textbook about how immigration has increased and how alien immigrants...have played a role in some like racial problem...”(Kate); “[I]ike my particular race, we’ve only discussed it like twice this whole year and it was like, like a five minute thing and now you’re just like done” (Joseph); “We didn’t really come in until like halfway [through] the book...I feel like they just brought us up because of immigration”(Carlos); “[t]hey say immigrant influx and like they talk about the like, anti-immigration...like they don’t talk about like our contributions” (Angelica); “I feel like there’s been nothing more than we’re like referred to as a group...” (Evan).

For non-traditional students who generally have remained in minority status within the APUSH classroom, the lack of representation within the curriculum simply adds to their perceptions of marginalization and “otherness” in the class. As an organization committed to the “elimination of barriers that restrict access to AP for students from ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented” (College Board, 2018), College Board must proactively address not only the exterior conditions that hinder students

from entering – “accessing” – the AP classroom, but as importantly, must respond to the internal classroom conditions that limit students’ ability to fully engage with the curriculum when they arrive. The student participants’ disappointment, their dismay at seeing the contributions of Mexican Americans boiled down to “a five-minute thing” is a reaction to what critical race theorists would define as microinvalidations perpetrated by a hegemonic curriculum (Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010). Moreover, this gap in representation that subordinates people of color within the historical record, affects not only students of color, but naturally influences the perceptions and beliefs of privileged, White students in the class (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

In light of this, as the primary drivers of both the “what” and “how” surrounding AP teachers’ approach to their curriculum and instruction within the Advanced Placement classroom, College Board should review its policies and practices related specifically to APUSH. Currently, in order for a school to be an approved provider of the AP US History course, College Board makes the following requirements:

- The students and teacher have access to a college-level U.S. history textbook, diverse primary sources, and multiple secondary sources written by historians or scholars interpreting the past.
- The course provides opportunities to deepen student understanding of the required content outlined in each of the units described in the course and exam description.
- The course provides opportunities to deepen student understanding of the course themes.

- The course provides opportunities for students to develop the historical thinking skills:
  - Skill 1: Developments and Processes
  - Skill 2: Sourcing and Situation
  - Skill 3: Claims and Evidence in Sources
  - Skill 4: Contextualization
  - Skill 5: Making Connections (through the application of the 3 historical reasoning processes—comparison, causation, continuity and change)
  - Skill 6: Argumentation (using historical reasoning processes)

AP U.S. History resource requirements:

- The school ensures that each student has a college-level U.S. history textbook (in print or electronic format) published within the last 10 years for individual use inside and outside of the classroom. The textbook is supplemented when necessary to meet the curricular requirements.
- The school ensures that the teacher has a copy of the most recent edition of a U.S. history textbook and other appropriate materials to support instruction.
- The school ensures that each student has copies of primary sources and other instructional materials used in the course for individual use inside and outside of the classroom.
- The school ensures that each student has access to support materials for the U.S. history course, including scholarly, college-level works that correspond with course topics; writings by major history authors; as well as standard reference works such as encyclopedias, atlases, collections of

historical documents, and statistical compendiums, either in a school or public library or via the internet.

(College Board, 2019)

In addition to the above list, while not “endorsing, authorizing, recommending, or approving,” College Board presents an example list of U.S. History textbooks that could be used to meet the requirements for AP approval.

With its Equity and Access Policy Statement in mind, to what extent within these requirements does College Board ensure that schools and teachers offer the APUSH course in a manner that is equitable to all students? Recognizing that textbooks presented as part of their “example” texts will be those most likely adopted by schools and teachers, have they examined said books with appropriate representative groups, to the extent that they can ensure that the texts on the list present a diverse and balanced view of the historical record? Is there a system in place for APUSH teachers to receive professional development, provided and required by College Board, that builds the capacity of teachers to present racially/culturally sensitive curriculum to a diverse group of students in a respectful, responsible, and responsive way? As the governing organization of Advanced Placement, College Board has a responsibility to the teachers and students within the APUSH course beyond the proclamation of equity and access. Without clear guidance and support to intentionally implement curriculum and instruction that values all students, and makes particular efforts to engage non-traditional students, the likelihood of making far-reaching and sustained changes in the positioning and experiences of non-traditional students in the APUSH course remains out of reach.

## **Limitations**

This section offers insights into and acknowledges the limitations of this qualitative study. It presents a reflection on the limitations presented in Chapter 3 and offers notice to future researchers seeking to replicate the study or expand upon it.

**Generalizability.** As a narrative case study of a group of five non-traditional students in the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History, this research is specific to a particular group of students' experiences, in a particular class, with a particular teacher, at a specific moment in time. The purpose of the study was not to generalize to a larger group, but rather to listen intently to the voices of a small group of students to gain a clear understanding of their experiences as non-traditional students of color in a class with potentially racially/culturally sensitive material; and to determine the interactions that helped or hindered their perceptions of their own identity and position within this figured world of APUSH. These individual cases may not be generalizable to a broader group of students in a different AP context, however, the commonality of experience presented by the students offer useful insights to educators looking to identify and mitigate factors that hinder the access, engagement, and success of non-traditional students of color in the arena of AP. Additionally, their insights have proven worthy of further exploration across a larger cross-section of non-traditional students of color.

**Self-Reporting.** For each of the case studies, the students self-reported their perceptions and beliefs about their experiences in various parts of their personal and academic lives. Though the purpose of the study was to highlight student voice, their self-reporting has the potential to be problematic within a research study. Student responses were limited to their viewpoints and as such were one-sided. Additionally, there is the possibility that

students responded with what they thought I wanted to hear, what they believed would be more interesting, and conversely, may not have omitted or not have been as forthcoming with responses. To moderate this limitation, analysis was done both within and across cases, and student response data was triangulated with other sources for a broader view and greater accuracy.

**Positionality.** As a district administrator and former principal of the study site and one of its feeder middle school, my position offered the benefit of access to resources and prior experience with the setting gave me a better understanding of the context in which the study occurred had I not had a background within the district. I understand that I did not come into the study with “fresh eyes”, and this may have limited or biased my understanding and interpretation. At the same time, because I knew some of the student participants from my previous positions, but was no longer an administrator at their school site, I believe the students were more honest more quickly as they undertook their journals and interviews. To mitigate the power dynamic that undoubtedly existed, students were constantly reminded that their participation was voluntarily, that their interviews were for research purposes only, that their grades would not be linked in any way to this study, and that all aspects of the study would remain anonymous.

Despite methods to alleviate the influence of my positionality, ultimately, students were aware of my former and current positions as an administrator within the district. They were aware and understood that a part of my current job is to oversee secondary schools, and as such students may have felt compelled to be less open or honest about their feedback in an effort to protect their teacher, their site administrators, or their school in general.



**Objectivity.** As a Black woman who holds a history in her own life of being the only person in academic classes and in work settings, I recognize that I bring a bias to this study. I have lived the experience of these students, and as I listened to the stories of the students, I was reminded of my own life experiences. As a researcher, I remained in constant check of my own reactions and feelings, and documented my emotions and thoughts throughout the study. I remained faithful to the voice of the student, documenting their words and making careful note of my own interpretations, questions, and wonderings as they shared their stories.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provided insight into the lived experience of a limited sampling of non-traditional students in a very specific context, Advanced Placement United States History. The students proved to be insightful and thoughtful in their responses, demonstrating the valuable discernments to be gained from foregrounding student voice in the continued study of this topic. The very specific composition of the study with five students at one school site in a singular AP subject, with a singular teacher makes generalizability to broader populations of students and subject areas difficult. Future studies should look to expand beyond the limited scope of this study to give voice to and learn lessons from a larger group of non-traditional students within the academically elite world of Advanced Placement.

The initial intent of the study was to explore the experiences of both Latinx and African-American students within the figured world of APUSH. However, due to limitations in the recruitment pool, no students who identified as solely African-American were part of the study. Because of this, the results of the study were mainly from a viewpoint of students who identified as Mexican American or multi-racial. The historical narrative of Latinx peoples in the United States varies greatly from that of African Americans in the United

States, and as such, future research that looks specifically at how African American students interact with the people and curriculum in APUSH is recommended.

The students within this study were from a specific freshman transition program designed to build academic skills and social capital prior to their entrance into Advanced Placement. As such, the students were well primed to enter into the figured world of APUSH. Future research is needed to explore how students without any such transitional support – likely the majority of enrollees – perceive their experiences into and through APUSH. And though not the focus of the study, the participants' previous enrollment in the QUEST transition program did greatly influence their experiences within the AP program generally, and APUSH specifically. As such, a more in-depth exploration of the program's components and ways that students believed the program both positively and negatively influenced their subsequent AP experience is worth further research, as it may serve as a possible model of support for non-traditional students entering Advanced Placement.

Additionally, while APUSH is certainly ripe with content that is racially/culturally sensitive, other AP courses, AP Language and Literature, for example, also hold high potential for challenging content for non-traditional students of color. Future studies exploring the experiences of non-traditional students in other specific AP courses in which students engage in sensitive curriculum will offer the opportunity to begin to triangulate data and gather information on possible trends throughout a diverse offering of AP courses.

Whereas this study chose to focus specifically on student voice and the above suggestions also concentrate on the experience of the student, there is also much research to be done related to Advanced Placement instructors. The students in this study all had the same teacher, and generally had positive interactions with him throughout their time in the

class. A more focused view of the instructor's influence on students' positioning in the class would be worthwhile, as would be a more in-depth look at APUSH instructors' comfort level, preparation for, and delivery of the APUSH curriculum, particularly racially/culturally sensitive material, to classrooms that contain varying numbers of non-traditional students of color. What, if any, specific pedagogical moves do instructors make when introducing and teaching sensitive material and do the instructional practices change with type of students in the class? How do White and privileged teacher position themselves; traditional, White, and privileged students; and non-traditional students of color within the APUSH class? Do they recognize the biases and privileges that they bring to the classroom and what, if anything, do they do to mitigate the effect of these on their teaching of the APUSH curriculum to non-traditional students of color? Lastly, in considering teacher actions, future researchers may want to delve deeper into how teachers, apart from the larger systems in place in the school, support the entrée of non-traditional students of color into the figured world of AP in general and APUSH specifically; and further, how can they help these students fully integrate into the class through both curricular and pedagogical decisions.

### **Conclusions**

The call of equity and access has sounded throughout the educational community for decades as educators and policymakers attempt to make good on the promises espoused by the founding fathers as they introduced the first iterations of compulsory education all those years ago. Years after the landmark declarations of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* and Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a student's trajectory in K-12 schooling, and subsequent post-secondary options, remains inextricably tied to elements of race, culture,

and socioeconomic status. With the road to college entry running squarely through academically rigorous coursework, the importance of student entry and success in Advanced Placement and similar classes cannot be overemphasized. While AP has long been a haven for the White and privileged, recruitment efforts to open access into these courses has been on the rise. Recent numbers, however, show a continuing gap between the achievement of White and Asian students – traditional members of the AP community – and their non-traditional peers – namely, for purposes of this study, Mexican American and Afro-Latinx students.

The study looked to highlight the voices of these non-traditional AP students in one of the most popular, but also one of the most academically and socially challenging courses of Advanced Placement United States History. Through their own words, the study explored the interactions that influenced their perceptions of their experiences within the course.

Ultimately, the study looked to answer the overarching research question: In what ways, if any, do Mexican American and Afro-Latinx students' perceptions of their identity and position in the figured world of AP US History affect their engagement with and learning in the class. The following sub-questions were also addressed: 1) What actions, if any, by the school, teacher, or privileged peers do non-traditional students of color believe help and/or hinder their perceptions of their academic identity and positioning within the academically rigorous figured world? 2) What is each student's perception of his/her academic identity and position within the figured world of Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) and in what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence their learning and engagement? 3) In what ways, if any, do students' perceptions change with the presentation and study of racially/culturally sensitive material within the APUSH curriculum? In what ways, if any, do these perceptions influence learning and engagement?

Through interviews and journals students described their experiences, provided their opinions, and offered insights into the actions and interactions that helped and hindered the building of their academic identities and ultimately their engagement in the APUSH course. The study informs educational leaders both locally and broadly of practices that aid student engagement and achievement and practices that continue to marginalize and separate students from within the APUSH class. Students, in their own words, championed the need for caring and demanding teachers who held them accountable to high expectations; classroom and school supports that aided in their successful completion of rigorous coursework; early preparation for high school academic coursework; and an APUSH curriculum that presented a diverse and varied view of the historical narrative. Teachers and educational leaders alike must work to ensure a time where all students consider themselves and are considered full-fledged, equal members of the AP and APUSH community.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Qualitative Narrative Case Study

Dear (removed for anonymity) Advanced Placement Student,

I am a student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM). I am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation to explore the experiences of students of color in AP US History classes. You are being contacted because you were identified by an educator within your school.

Through the course of my research I hope to learn about your perspective of how African American/Black and Latinx students are welcomed into and participate in the class culture of AP US History. The culture of a class is created by the dialogue, actions, and interactions of people with each other and the artifacts (curriculum, readings, assignments, etc.) of the class. I believe this research, and your participation in it, has the potential to shape educational policies, practices, and interventions to advance the success of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students in AP.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a short video/audio/written journal (your choice, depending on what you feel most comfortable doing) each week describing your experience in the class during the 12 weeks that the study will take place. Additionally, you will be interviewed individually to discuss your experience as an African American or Latinx AP student. There will be two interviews, one at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study; the interview will last approximately thirty minutes. With your signed permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will be provided a typed transcript of your interview to verify its accuracy and to clarify any information.

Your confidentiality will be highly regarded and respected throughout your involvement in the research study. I will not reveal your participation in the study to any individuals on campus. Your name will never be used in any reporting of the data or findings, and your identity will be protected. Additionally, your journal entries will be protected in a protected Google Team Drive accessible to only you and myself; any files associated with the study will be securely locked in a file drawer in my office.

It is my sincere hope you will agree to participate in my research project as I feel you have a unique and valuable perspective that could help shape future school policy and practices. To compensate you for your time and to thank you for your participation, I will provide you with a ten-dollar gift card to a restaurant of your choice for each interview and two AMC movie passes upon completion of your journal entries. If you are willing to participate in this study, please respond by November 16, 2018. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare, Doctoral Student  
UC, San Diego and CSU, San Marcos  
760.752.1229; tiffany.campbell@smusd.org

## Appendix B: Parent Informed Consent Form

### California State University, San Marcos Consent to Have Your Child Act as a Research Subject

#### **The Story of Us: How Black and Latinx Students Navigate Race, Power, and Their Own Positional Identities in the Figured World of AP United States History**

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare, under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Stowell, Professor and Chair, CSUSM School of Education, with approval from the San Marcos Unified School District, is conducting a research study to explore African American/Black and Latinx student experiences in AP US History. We hope to learn what these students think about the culture of the class, how they feel they are treated in the class, and if there are actions by the teacher or their peers that positively or negatively influence their participation in the class. As a parent of an African American/Black or Latinx student enrolled in AP US History, your permission is requested for your child to participate in this research study.

If you grant permission for your child to participate in this research study, he/she will be involved in the following:

1. Students will complete short video, audio, or written weekly journals that discuss their experience in the AP US History class for the duration of the 3-month study (approximately twelve journal entries).
2. Students will participate in interviews (outside of class hours) regarding their experiences as students of color enrolled in San Marcos High School and in AP US History class. The interviews will be conducted by Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare, a former school administrator and current district administrator. The interviews will take place in December 2018 and March 2019. The interviews will last approximately thirty minutes and will be audio recorded and transcribed. Your student will be provided a typed transcript of his/her interview to review before its use in the study.

Participation in this research study may involve minor risks. The risks associated with this study include:

1. A potential for a loss of confidentiality for research participants. This is highly unlikely as no names or identifying information will be used in reporting the data. All research data and records, including student journals, will be kept on a password protected computer or, in the case of paper documents, in a locked file drawer inside a locked office. The CSUSM Institutional Review Board provides oversight to minimize risks and may review research records and protocols.
2. Although the interview is brief, students may become bored or fatigued with the interview process. As the interviews are voluntary, students may skip questions or ask that the interview be discontinued if they become bored or tired.

Since this is a research study, there may be some unknown risks that are presently unforeseeable. Should any new risks be known, you will be informed immediately. **Participation in this study is purely voluntary and in no way will be used as a component of a student's grade in any course or standing in any program connected with the school. Consent to participate in the study may be revoked by the parent or student at any time. Revocation of the consent to**

**participate in the study will not negatively affect a student’s grade in any course or standing in any program connected with the school.**

Participation in this study may or may not benefit your student. The student journals and/or interviews may help students reflect on how they feel about school and AP courses (participation, relationships with others, etc.). The researcher may learn more about how to improve the learning environment of AP classes for African American/Black and Latinx students. Educators and society may benefit from this knowledge.

The researcher may remove your child from the study without your consent if the researcher feels it is in the child’s best interest or the best interest of the study. The student may also be withdrawn from the study if he/she does not follow the interview instructions given by the researcher. Your child will be able to ask questions or seek clarification at any time during any aspect of the study.

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of the study that may affect your willingness to have your student continue to participate.

Your student will be given two AMC movie tickets for their participation in the interview and two ten-dollar gift cards to the restaurant of their choice for their completion of the student journals.

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare has explained this research study to you and has answered your questions. You have been provided a copy of this signed consent form. If you have any additional questions or research-related problems, you may reach Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare at 760.752.1229. Additionally, you may contact the California State University, San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 760.750.4029 to inquire about this research study, your rights as a research subject, or to report any research-related problems or concerns.

- I give consent for my child to participate in this research study.
- I do not give consent for my child to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature & Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature & Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature & Date



Appendix C: Student Assent Form, Interviews

**High School Student Assent Forms, Interviews**

Being a student of color influences your perspective of the world around you, and specifically, your perspective of the culture of the Advanced Placement program and the AP US History course. Your understanding of how your race/ethnicity shapes how you interact with others and how others interact with you is an important component of this research study.

With your consent and as a part of this research study, I would like to ask you questions about your experiences as an African American/Black or Latinx student at the high school, in AP courses in general, and in AP US History in particular. Your responses to the interview questions will help me better understand how your interactions as a student of color with adults, peers, and the curriculum can either positively or negatively influence your experience in the Advanced Placement program.

Before participating in this interview, please keep these important considerations in mind:

1. There is no right or wrong answer to any interview question. Your honest answer to each question is your best answer.
2. If there is a question you do not want to answer, you may tell me to move on to the next question.
3. If at any time after starting the interview you wish to stop, you may do so.
4. This interview is not a requirement of your AP course nor is it a part of your grade in your AP course or any other of your courses.
5. Your participation is purely voluntary.
6. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed. You will be provided a typed copy of your interview transcription and will be allowed to review it for accuracy or to remove any of your comments you feel may reveal your identity or you would otherwise wish not to be included.

Your signature below indicates you have read this form and consent to participate in the interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D: First Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

### First interview. Semi-structured. 30 - 45 minutes.

**1. What has been your experience as a student of color on the SMHS campus?**

The purpose of this question is to set the stage for the student's experience. They have a background in discussing race/ethnicity through the QUEST program, so I hope to establish:

- a) if they feel that race/ethnicity plays a part in their school experience
- b) if yes, what role does it play
- c) if that experience is positive or negative or neutral

Follow up question might include:

How do you think the school handles the diversity of the student body? What makes you say so?  
How would you describe the experience you have had as a student of color in your classes with teachers? With your peers?

**2. Let's talk about academics specifically. I know that as part of QUEST you have taken some honors/AP classes - how many honors or Advanced Placement courses have you taken?**

Have you taken any outside of QUEST?

(If yes) How would you describe the racial/ethnic makeup?

(If no) What are some reasons for not taking any others?

**3. I am interested in your thoughts about the AP program. What type of kid takes AP? (*why do you say that?*)**

**Would you consider yourself a typical AP student? (*why or why not?*)**

I want to find out if they think there is a "typical" or "traditional" AP student. Do they recognize the racial/ethnic disparity in enrollment? Questions will need to be guided by their response. *Do they believe that fellow students recognize them as an AP student? Would teachers?* I want to begin to establish this school's historical narrative about AP from the students (does it differ from what the adults say about AP? Do students believe that the enrollment is truly open?)

**4. As a student of color have you had any experience with any curriculum that could be considered to be racially/culturally sensitive?**

(I may need to probe or prompt here a bit; the question may be too open ended for them – *think about your English or your history class, any texts or topics?*)

*How were these topics handled by the teacher?*

*Has anything come up in your current history class?* (I need to remember not to lead – I'm looking for their experience and I may find that this not have been an issue for them in the past)

### **APUSH Experiences - Journal Prompts**

**Hello students! The following questions are possible prompts that you could use for your journal entries. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it mandatory to answer these questions. They are simply a starting point to think about your experiences in class for the week.**

**I ask that your audio/visual journals be at least 5 minutes in length, written about ½ a page. Upload your journals to this team drive.**

**Thank you!**

1. Did you think about your race/ethnicity in class this week? If so, what prompted it?  
Was it a positive/negative/neutral experience?
2. Describe the curriculum in class this week. What specific topics were presented? Did any topics make you uncomfortable (in terms of race/ethnicity)? How did the teacher present the topics? What activities did you engage in to learn the topics?
3. Describe your participation in class this week? Was there whole group discussion? Did you participate? Why or why not? Was there small group discussion? Did you participate? Why or why not?
4. Describe your interaction in class this week? Did you talk with your peers in class this week? Who did you talk to? Did you have any verbal exchanges that made you think about your race/ethnicity?
5. Do you feel like an AP student – a part of the class community – this week? What makes you feel that way?

Appendix F: Journal Prompts Set 2

**Hello Students! As we move toward the end of the study, here are some additional prompts to help you with your journal writing. As always, these are suggested, not required prompts. Written journals should be about half a page in length, audio/visual should be about 5 minutes in length. Thank you!**

1. Stereotypes came up often- going against stereotypes, not wanting others to stereotype you, assumptions about abilities based on stereotypes, etc...

What assumptions or stereotypes do you feel face in your class? Are the stereotypes positive, negative, or both (or neither)? How, if at all, do you alter your behavior in response to others beliefs (or stereotypes)?

2. What has been the most engaging topic in APUSH this year for you? Why was it engaging? What assignments did you have to do with it? Did you find yourself participating more because you were more engaged?

What was the least engaging? What assignments did you have to do with it? What about the topic (or experience) made it less engaging than other topics?

3. Think about your friends who are not taking AP/H courses. Would you encourage them to take AP courses? Why or why not? How would you sell the benefits of it? What are the drawbacks? What reason would you share with them on why you are taking AP/H and what are you getting out of it?
4. All of you have mentioned the idea that your background/culture and/or the culture & history of people of color in general has not been fully explored in your textbooks or class.
  - a. Where do you learn about your history? Do you learn from family members? Your own research? Friends? Other places?
  - b. Is learning about your history important? Why do you feel this way?
5. Think back to your time throughout the year in APUSH. What has your teacher done to make you feel welcome and comfortable in the class? Have there been times when you have not felt welcome and comfortable in class because of the actions of your teacher? Explain.

Think back to your time throughout the year in APUSH. What have your peers done to make you feel welcome and comfortable in the class? Have there been times when you

have not felt welcome and comfortable in class because of the actions of your peers? Explain.

6. A social, cultural and academic question: In what ways are you like your peers in APUSH? Why do you say so? In what ways are you different? Why do you say so?
7. Chapter 28 of your text is the civil rights movement. Did you learn anything new from this section of the curriculum? What activities did you do with this section? Discuss the class dynamic during this portion of the curriculum: who participated? Did you participate? How did the teacher present the material? Etc...

Were the civil rights movements of different groups given equal time? Were there any connections made between these movements and current events? Do you feel an appropriate amount of time was spent on the movements?

8. AP test preparation: How did you prepare for your AP test(s) outside of class? Did you have any study groups? If so, who was a part of the group? If not, why not? Were you aware of any study groups formed by other members of your class? Were you asked to join any study groups?
9. AP test preparation: How did your teacher prepare the class for the test in the weeks immediately leading up to the test? Were there opportunities for studying in class? What did that look like? Did your teacher offer additional study time with him outside of class hours? If so, did you participate? If you participated, how did it go? If it was offered and you did not participate, why did you choose not to?
10. Post AP test: Reflect on how you felt you did on the test? Did you feel prepared for the questions? How confident are you in your performance? How did your classmates respond to the test? Do you have a sense if you performed better, the same, or worse than your classmates? What was their confidence level after the test?

## Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Protocol

### **Focus Group Discussion. Loosely structured. 45 minutes – 1 hour**

This will be an observed focus group discussion. The five students know each other well, so I will ask 1 student to lead the discussion. An overarching prompt will be provided to students and additional questions will be available as necessary. I will remain an observer unless I need clarification or the conversation stalls.

**You will be participating in a semi-structured focus group discussion. Your peer leader will introduce the prompt and guide the discussion as necessary. Use your academic discussion norms: “share the air”, “build on comments”, “respectfully agree and disagree”, “use examples”**

#### Prompt

Respond to the following claim: Nontraditional students have equal opportunity to access and have success in honors and AP programming at SMHS.

Additional questions as needed:

- As a nontraditional student in ways were you prepared to enter AP? In what ways not?
- In what ways do you feel supported in your AP courses? In what ways not?
- How are you the same as your privileged, White peers? How not? Why do you say so?

## Appendix H: Second Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

### **Second Individual Interview. Semi-Structured. 30 – 45 minutes**

These in-depth interviews will follow the first introductory interview and the focus group discussion. I will use student journals and the focus group discussion to inform the interview questions. The following are possible questions:

1. Let's begin where the focus group discussion left off. Having had time to digest, do you believe that as a nontraditional student of color at SMHS you have equal opportunity to access and succeed in honors/AP here?
2. Did you feel prepared to enter into honors/AP programming?
3. What types of supports have you received to help you in your honors/AP classes?
4. Let's talk specifically about APUSH. What activities did the teacher use to present the topics? (lecture, whole group discussion, small group discussion? Any use of AP strategies like debate or Socratic seminar?)
5. Talk about the moments in which racially/culturally sensitive material was presented. What was it? How did your teacher present the material?
6. Did you fully participate during the activities, why or why not? Did you feel obligated to participate during topics that dealt with race/ethnicity (e.g. slavery, immigration, civil rights)? Did you choose not to participate during topics that dealt with race/ethnicity?
7. How do you think being a student of color influenced how you experienced this unit (or particular parts of this unit)?

Appendix I: Approval for Research Study

October 31, 2018

Tiffany Campbell-Cunefare  
1119 Park Hill Lane  
Escondido, CA, 92025

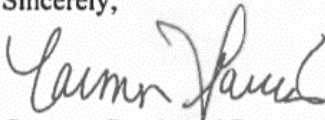
RE: Request to Conduct Research in the San Marcos Unified School District

Dear Mrs. Campbell-Cunefare:

I have reviewed your research proposal, *The Story of Us: How Black and Latinx Students Navigate Race, Power, and their Own Positional Identities in the Figured World of AP United States History*. Your proposed study of AP History students at San Marcos High School is designed to measure and investigate how Black and Latinx students identify and perceive their position in this culture when racially and/or culturally sensitive curriculum is presented. Your research is in line with the District's LCAP goal to "prepare students to successfully enter higher education or pursue a viable career path by providing all students with an equitable opportunity to access a coherent, articulated and engaging instructional program." Therefore, I grant you permission to conduct your study at San Marcos High School with the understanding that participation in the study by students remains purely voluntary.

Upon completion of your study, please provide my office with a summary of your findings.

Sincerely,



Carmen García, Ed.D.  
Superintendent



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