

# *Iowa Journal for the Social Studies*

A peer-reviewed electronic journal



Volume 31 Issue 2  
Summer 2023

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**Editor's Notes**

Greetings from the editorial staff of the *Iowa Journal for the Social Studies*!

We hope that all of you are having a safe start to your summer.

This issue of the *Iowa Journal for the Social Studies* is dedicated to the principle that all men (human beings) are created equal. The United States is witnessing a startling increase in intolerance and discrimination, which is appearing in many manifestations. The fact that there has been an increase in de facto and de jure discrimination supported by a minority of Americans but a majority of politicians in some states. This should concern social studies teachers and researchers. We know from experience that in contentious times, such as this, democracy and democratic principles, including that all citizens are equal and that even non-citizens have civil and human rights, are put in jeopardy. We know that in times of crisis, it is “easy” to blame minoritized communities as the cause of the crisis. History has taught us that it is too attractive to dominant groups to strip others of their rights and dignity, thinking that somehow, the dominant group(s) gain by diminishing others. We also know that when minority groups are successfully stripped of their humanity it is easier and easier to find the next “enemy.” We cannot ignore the warning that Martin Niemöller sent us about this path in 1946. In the end, our principles, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution are in danger of not just being left unfulfilled but worse, a tool of oppression. The editors of the *Iowa Journal for the Social Studies* remains critical of efforts by some politicians to reinforce oppositional dynamics of “us” and “them” as a way of demanding political fealty in ways that dehumanize communities who fight and resist in visible and invisible ways for their visibility and representation. In this journal, we have several articles that address aspects of this need for us to explore what is a modern democracy.

Our first article explores how the racial identity of teachers are a key factor in how they negotiate the implementation of social studies curriculum. Bae explored how one Asian American preservice educator’s perspectives on how to negotiate teaching history to include marginalized voices that have been pushed into the hidden and null social studies curriculums.

Our theory and practice section includes two exciting articles. First Corrigan addresses the use of Human Rights Education (HRE) in the social studies classroom as a means to promote social justice in the social studies classroom, especially for LGBTQ+ students. Corrigan provides an analysis of how to use events in the US (Stonewall Riot) and South Africa (Forest Town Raid) can be taught using the HRE framework in analyzing these violations of human rights. Next, Maloy, Trust, and Rodgers highlight how to use a new free online source for teaching civic education. This new resource is to help teachers get students to engage in active citizenship.

In the Teacher Features, Gillen provides an excellent example of how he and his students responded to the lasting effects of the Covid-19 crisis (with some help from Taylor Swift). He found that using reflection-in-action improved student learning as well as his active use of unconditional positive regard.

Lastly, we have two excellent book reviews. Schamberger provides an excellent review of Ray, V. E. (2022) *On critical race theory: Why it matters & why you should care*. The review reveals why this text is a critical piece for anyone who truly wants to understand critical race theory and avoid the fake culture war crisis of “wokeness.” In the second book review, Li analyzes Lo, J. C. work *Making Classroom Discussions Work: Methods for Quality Dialogue in the Social Studies*. Li analyzes the text for the ways in which it addresses the issue of equity in the construction of equitable citizens.

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A graphic featuring ten black silhouettes of diverse people standing in a line. Behind them is a whiteboard with the text 'STAND UP FOR SOCIAL STUDIES' written in a casual, hand-drawn font. The background of the entire image is a stylized American flag with red and white stripes and a blue field with white stars. The whiteboard has a small number '5' in the top right corner.

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**“Casting Light to the Shadows”:  
Understanding the Impact of Asian American Identity on Social  
Studies Curriculum**

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William Bae  
University of Texas at Austin

**Abstract:** This qualitative study considers the importance of Asian American identity on curriculum development. I argue through identity theory, Asian American teachers seek a better sense of self through insertion of their stories into curriculum, which underrepresents and typecasts them and their home communities. Findings suggest ways to strengthen curriculum with narratives that provide more robust civic representation of Asian Americans.

**Keywords:** Racial Identity, Asian American, Cultural Citizenship, AsianCrit, Social Studies

### **Introduction:**

Attacks to multiculturalism and diversity in education have been under assault by hegemonic entities for much of education's history. If the ideas or narratives do not fit within the plans of the hegemony, they are actively silenced, oftentimes through violent means. Today, we see this continue throughout the United States with attacks on Critical Race Theory in places like Texas with the introduction of House Bill 3979 and Senate Bill 3. These fundamentally divisive bills look to continue the erasure of marginalized histories in the institutions that have the space to explore and understand these histories: within the school setting and within the social studies curriculum. While these forces mobilize, it does not mean that resistance is absent. There are teachers throughout the field of education that are fighting the good fight and giving spaces for students to explore a more completed story of the past through the accounts of others. Oftentimes these same teachers look within themselves and ask how their identities fit within the story of America.

The story of Asian Americans that is typically explored in the social studies curriculum reflects the linear narrative of the United States: a narrative of progress and freedom with the assumed compliance of cultural assimilation. Asian Americans are tied to the United States in a way that presents dependence on the American way of life. That story of Asian Americans presented in history textbooks also reflects the social reality that many Asian Americans face too: stereotypes and cultural simplifications that suggest that progress and a level of racial equality has been achieved. These devices of conformity and control look to keep Asian Americans constrained to a certain outlook that negates their memberships, their civic identities and their agencies whilst continuing to perpetuate a problematic understanding of the Asian American experience.

In this article, I would like to discuss the importance of racial identity for teachers, specifically the racial identity of Asian Americans in the profession and look at the implications on negotiating the curriculum as it exists through the experience of one Asian American participant. Before looking at the design of the study, it is important to discuss the literature that currently exists and understand how this project will build upon the hard work of others.

### **Literature Review:**

Through this project, I would like to illuminate the notions that have surrounded Asian American identity for teachers in social studies and understand the discourse that currently exists. Through existing literature, the argument can be shown in at least three parts: firstly, I will show how Asian Americans are often blanketly portrayed in educational settings through the model minority mythos. Second, I will discuss how Asian Americans are arbitrarily portrayed in social studies curriculum and the effects of Pan-Asianism. Finally, I will discuss the structural, social, and institutional obstacles Asian Americans navigate in attempting to maintain their racial identity in their teaching practice.

American political leaders have used Asian Americans as examples of minority success for the past fifty years (Hsu, 2017). They often use this minority group to question why other minority groups, particularly African Americans and LatinX Americans, could not replicate the achievements that Asian Americans had created. While some may say that these high praises are based on merit and should be welcomed, this creation of a model minority myth continues to prop the hegemony of whiteness (Lee, S.J., 2009). Looking at this myth through the lens of relative valorization, Asian Americans' interpreted academic success was a way to intentionally and strategically position them as better than other racial minority groups (Chow, 2019). This position allowed those with authority, who were often white, to argue that other racial groups'



lack of success was their own doing and not the fault of any oppressive system or institutions. Despite this high praise and positioning as acceptable minorities, this model minority trope still positions Asian Americans within a racial hierarchy, where they are still under white Americans (Lee, S. J. 2009; 2022; Ng, Lee, S. S., & Pak, Y. K. 2007). As explained in Kim's (1999) work on Racial Triangulation, Asian Americans are situated in a space between whites and blacks because they are binary of the racial discourse. While white Americans praise and commend Asian Americans for their success and achievements in the public sphere to denote the contrast to Black Americans, they are still able to ostracize Asian Americans and sustain in a racial hierarchy through *other* stereotypes such as the "forever foreigner" due to their physical appearance and culture (Kim, 1999). This discourse of a model minority standard has also created an expectation of a universal social experience, creating a pan ethnic umbrella to describe all Asian Americans.

This model minority monolith has pierced its way into the lack of educational exposure of Asian Americans in subjects like social studies and the perception of a monolithic Asian experience through Pan-Asianism. Importantly, when the term "Asian American" is used, oftentimes it refers to people of East Asian descent, such as Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans. Other groups, particularly those from Southeast Asia like Hmong Americans and Thai Americans, are forgotten or neglected because of the assumption and unification that the term places upon them (Lee, S. J., 2022). "The label Asian American has come to suggest a depoliticized unified immigrant experience shared by all Asian ethnic groups" and "a term that restricted individuality through group conformity" (Philip, 2012, p. 223). The postulation of uniformity has led to ideas that all Asian Americans have uniformed experiences, they have uniformed reactions and responses on events that affect them or relate to

them, and they have uniformed understandings of what is acceptable in the public sphere. There may be some that question whether this pan ethnic designation is problematic at all. They may suggest that Asian Americans should just be happy enough to be mentioned at all. The problem with the designation is that it silences the Asian American perspective from the larger, social dialogue (Wertsch, 1998). By blanketing the experience of all Asian Americans, it creates a “fragmentation” of critical reflection on what is actually being shared of their stories and the active process of silencing that deafens their memberships, their civic identities and their agencies tied to their ethnic identity (Wertsch, 1998).

This dominant and problematic narrative of sameness within all Asian experiences is presented and reified in social studies curriculums like the eleventh grade U.S. History curriculum in the state of Texas. When it comes to the studying of Asian American experiences in social studies, there is often an absence of stories or a reductive single story that is shared. For example, in the U.S. History curriculum for eleventh grade as presented by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), histories related to Asians are limited to four events: the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese mass incarceration during World War II, The Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Moreover, these events are often told from the perspective of the United States and neglect other voices affected by them. This limiting of events leads to “invisibility of Asian American experience” and an assumption that all Asian Americans can relate to these specific events because of how Asian Americans are viewed in the lens of Pan-Asianism (An, 2016, p. 258). The danger of this invisibility of experience “sends a message that Asian Americans are not legitimate members of the nation and have little place in the country’s history” (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 216 ). It also reinforces the belief that all Asian ethnic groups experience the same challenges and experience the same history in the United States, “thereby silencing the multiple

voices among them” (An, 2016, p. 259). The gap of time between the events mentioned in the TEKS also empowers the invisibility and can have some assume that Asian Americans did not contribute or participate in American narrative. Asian Americans were not introduced into the dialogue of the United States until the 1880s with Chinese immigration and the introduction of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. The next time the Asian experience is in the front of the curriculum is Japanese mass incarceration during World War II in 1942. There is over a sixty-year gap between these events; Asian Americans are not mentioned, and their narrative is silenced and after the Vietnam War in 1975, the same occurrence happens again where Asian Americans are absent from the narrative to the modern era. This again strengthens the idea that the Asian American experience is unimportant and inconsequential to the American experience.

As important as it is to frame the social discourse around Asian Americans and how the curriculum excludes them, it is also important to look at the Asian American experience in teaching and how these teachers’ identity as Asian American influence their decisions. While the research on the previous areas is more plentiful, research looking at Asian Americans in scholarship on teachers of color rarely appears (Rodríguez, 2018). Significantly, Asian Americans are among the largest growing student populations and yet they comprise less than two percent of the teaching force (Boser, 2011). What research is available shows how preservice teachers need to negotiate their identity and determine whether the teaching environment provides space for their identity. Oftentimes, these preservice teachers of color find that parts of their identities and understandings do not conform to the space they exist in and they are forced to confront the difficulties that this creates.

In a study conducted by Nguyen (2008), participants, who were immigrants of Vietnam and were teachers there, never considered themselves to be minorities until they immigrated to

the United States and dealt with the cultural differences in their new placements. The participants felt that in becoming “American teachers,” their “cultural identity was not only questioned by the larger society, but their teacher identity was also closely scrutinized” (Nguyen, 2008, p. 133).

These participants had their authenticity as teachers questioned because of their cultural differences that they were forced to openly confront such as their accented English, their conception of respect in American classrooms versus Vietnamese classrooms, and the difference in socio-economic status between them and their students. The challenges that teaching presents are already hard enough to navigate but to have parts of your cultural identity questioned because they do not fit the norm can further dissuade future candidates to join a system that devalues their experiences.

Pailliotet (1997) studied similar aspects of challenges Asian American preservice teachers through the case study of Vivian, “the only Asian and language minority in the target population of 23 students” (p. 676). Vivian’s educational story began in Vietnam, where she was an ethnic minority (Chinese) within the country. She describes the humiliation and physical abuse she endured “the schools’ dominant ideologies, culture, and language opposed her own” (Pailliotet, 1997, 678). Despite the abuses faced at school, she still held her culture and beliefs in high regard, seeing them as the most important things in her life (Pailliotet, 1997). After escaping Vietnam with what little she was able to leave with, she would come to the United States and still confront challenges that were created by her identity. During her years as a student, Vivian faced conflicts within her schooling as her beliefs and behaviors did not conform with the dominant culture. These tensions would manifest themselves again during her time in teacher preparation. For example, while her English has greatly improved, Vivian still

struggled with theoretical texts and academic papers because of the language they often implored, thus causing her to spend additional time using a dictionary to find the meaning to words and time to finish written assignments to the expectations of her professors. These language barriers would come to affect her health as she sacrificed meals and sleep to complete her studies and have negative effects on her relationships with her peers as she became increasingly isolated from her peers to keep up. Moreover, many of her professors would only come to understand her through her academic work and question whether she really knew the information because of the struggles they saw in her writing; despite describing the troubles in the writing, these professors put little effort to get to know and understand Vivian. “Vivian’s communication difficulties culminated when she flunked student teaching” (Pailliotet, 1997, 681). This preservice teacher’s experience of neglect due to the little effort to understand her story and being typecast as a “quiet Asian” had negative consequences upon her. This environment does little to accept Asian Americans as they must find ways to fit into the space, rather than opening the space to them.

Another challenge that is faced by Asian American preservice teachers and other preservice teachers of color is having teacher preparation programs that preach and believe in multicultural education and find out that they are often taught from a white perspective. Sheets and Chew (2002) looked at how implementation of a particular multicultural education, which was often taught from “the perspective of preparing teachers for diverse populations rather than from the standpoint of preparing teachers of color for diverse populations”, was difficult for Chinese American preservice teachers because of the dialogue and courses were often focused on White perspectives (p. 138). In the study, “participants felt that courses in teacher preparation programs in general and diversity courses in particular were designed for the dominating group”

(p. 138). The Chinese American credential candidates (CACC) described how conversations on real issues faced by them like “language loss, accent, name change, discomfort around White people, immigrant versus native born, perceived lack of respect in school settings, conflict between groups of color, and problems when interacting with White parents” were often neglected or unattended to because it was not a problem faced by White preservice teachers (Sheets & Chew, 2002, p. 138). Because they are people of color, certain programs assume that Asian American preservice teachers and other preservice teachers of color have a codex of knowledge to speak with other minority groups. This neglect can lead to a difficulty in teaching classes of diverse populations, which is often schools that are often understaffed and have job availability. It is unfair for these programs to put this burden on individuals that are learning to be teachers, just as their white classmates are and yet not have opportunities to learn how to engage in multiculturalism from their perspectives. These sentiments are not blanket problems that face all Asian American preservice teachers, but these deterrents should be noted so that programs and policy makers can address ways to open the space for Asian Americans and that their identity and experience feel validated.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

#### **Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit)**

Examining the experiences of Asian American teachers is first explored through an Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) lens. Introduced by Museus and Iftikar (2014), Asian Critical Race Theory looks to address distinct issues faced by Asian Americans, understand the oppressive structures that have crafted the current, destructive narrative, and provides complexity to groups that have been pushed into a pan ethnic identity. Seven tenets were established to “understand how white supremacy shapes the experience of Asian Americans” (Iftikar &

Museus, 2018, p. 940). This study will utilize the following tenets of AsianCrit: *Asianization*, *(re)constructive history*, and *story, theory, and praxis*. *Asianization* provides groundwork to understand the ways Asian Americans are racialized in the United States and how the different social constructions of Asian Americans (model minority, forever foreigner, etc.) “dehumanize and exclude Asian Americans” (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 940). Sprouting from the apparent absence of Asian American history as currently constructed in curriculum, *(Re)constructive history* looks to fill in the gaps through an Asian American historical perspective and provide space for more Asian American voices (Takaki, 1998; Tamura, 2001, 2003). Finally, *story, theory, and praxis* provides the avenue in which the narratives and histories of marginalized groups, like Asian Americans, can challenge the majoritarian, white narrative as it presently exists (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). It is through these tenets that we begin to understand the importance of identity and resistance through narrative and finding ways to challenge the common thought.

### **Cultural Citizenship**

Cultural Citizenship completed the framing that informed this work. Developed by Renato Rosaldo (1994), cultural citizenship looks at the urging of the disadvantaged for full citizenship despite their cultural difference of people of color from “mainstream” citizenship. As Rosaldo (1994) states, “cultural citizenship offers the possibility of legitimizing demands made in the struggle to enfranchise themselves. These demands can range from legal, political, and economic issues to matters of human dignity, well-being, and respect” (p. 57). However, as Ong (1996) explains, there is an “erroneous impression that cultural citizenship can be unilateral constructed and that immigrant or minority groups can escape the cultural inscription of state power and other forms of regulation that define the different modalities of belonging” (p. 738).

As a result, this study is more informed by Aihwa Ong's (1996) notion of cultural citizenship: "the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory" (p. 738). Ong describes the mediation one takes as they attempt to resist forms of hegemony, which in this case is represented by the standard curriculum. In this sense, cultural citizenship provides a context to understand the choices and decisions made by Asian Americans in their desire to provide voice and volume to an otherwise silent narrative.

**Method of Inquiry:**

This project looks to add to the current dialogue surrounding teacher identity through an Asian American lens. While there is substantial work that surrounds teacher identity and the identity of teachers of color, much of the work is focused on Black and Latinx teachers; I look to present an Asian American perspective on this issue that will continue to push the conversation forward. This qualitative study examines "how Asian American teachers negotiate curriculum in regard to their identity?". The single case study was the ideal form of research design because of the bounded nature of focusing on one participant's classroom experiences to answer the research question and to focus on the participant's experiences in a concrete and in-depth manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The single case study design also provides an opportunity for rich and deep inquiry into Nathan's decision-making process as a future teacher of color. The numerous artifacts and data sources allowed me to understand the decisions that were made by my participant to include his identity into a curriculum that is presented as neutral. While others may argue that this single case presented may not provide a deep enough understanding or touch



at the heart of the issue, I feel that the plethora of data collected and the data analysis provide a clear window into the understanding.

It is important to note my positionality as an Asian American (Korean American) and a former high school Social Studies teacher who has worked and taught in suburban settings. Much of my preservice experience was in an urban setting. I had experience teaching one year of middle school and three years of teaching in high school. The students I taught were majority white, middle to upper class, and many of my students had been a part of the district for most of their educational careers. For many of my students, I was the first Asian American teacher they encountered in their educational journey, and they had to wrestle and challenge their preconceived notions and thoughts they brought with them to class. Many students thought it would be difficult to understand me because they thought English was my second language or only focused on academic success because “that’s all Asians care about”. I found myself having to navigate and challenge the curriculum and its lack of representation along with navigating and challenging my students’ perception of me via race. I will say that for some of my Asian students, they saw their racial identity validated and felt a sense of belonging because of our similar racial identity and because of our relatable experience. In terms of my positionality in this research, I see myself as an indigenous outsider in two ways. I see myself as an indigenous outsider towards the participant and the classroom as I have had experience as a teacher for four years and understanding how the mechanics of teaching works, but I am an outsider to this particular setting and environment. I will need time to observe and understand the class dynamic and the way in which the teacher, participant, and students navigate the curriculum with their identity in mind. I am also an indigenous outsider in relation to the identity of my participant. While I and the participant are Asian Americans, I am Korean American, and my participant is

Vietnamese American and there are some shared cultural aspects which gives me some ideas of who my participant is and shared related experiences that I can understand but these cultures are different and there is complexity that I will need time to explore. I want to use this study to also demystify the belief Pan-Asianism in the Asian community.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was conducted in the spring of 2022 in an urban school district in a southwest state. The urban context of this site is significant due to the nature of the participant selected. The Asian American teacher education candidate was purposefully selected because of his overtly critical stances, identity consciousness and his relationship to the researchers' educational institution (Merriam, 2016). The participant, Nathan (pseudonym), is a member of the university's undergraduate-level teacher education program that has an explicit focus on urban school and critical approaches to teaching and learning in the social studies. . My participant, Nathan, was observed teaching a lesson on unemployment data through a racial lens in economics during the spring of 2022. Nathan is a Vietnamese American and explained during our interview his experiences as a first-generation American citizen that shaped his decision to become an educator of critical consciousness. He talked about questions he faced as a student like "I'm an American and yet my story is not being told so do I matter?" and "why is my story absent from history?" (Interview, February 11th, 2022). Nathan stated because of these types of neglect and open reflections on his identity that he chose to be an educator that provides an inclusive narrative.

Multiple sources of data were collected for Nathan during his social studies class and outside of his class including three digitally recorded, semi-structured, one-hour interviews with the participant and a two-hour field observation at the participant's placement high school.

Lesson plans and other course assignments that helped with crystallization were also gathered. The interviews and classroom observations were manually transcribed or transcribed by Zoom and were provided to the participant for member checks (Merriam, 2016). I manually coded transcripts of the interviews and analyzed them by noting patterns and themes, arriving at comparisons and contrasts, and determining conceptual explanations of the case study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020). For example, as the participant began to investigate his sense of identity and how it reflected in his teaching, patterns began to emerge that suggested his troubled notions of how hegemonic forces conscripted an identity upon and how this assumed identity was perpetuated in the curriculum. These patterns and data sources led to the following findings.

### **Themes**

Emerging from the initial data collected, the findings indicate that through the investigation into one's identity, teachers come away knowing that there are fundamental flaws in the curriculum that should be troubled. Those with a deliberate (intentional) approach find ways (and means) to disrupt the dominant narrative through use of their own experience and use of closely attached histories. The following themes came about:

#### **Theme 1: Flawed Identity Cast on Asian Americans**

Firstly, Nathan's growing consciousness of his identity led to his growing understanding of common stereotypes of Asian Americans such as the 'forever foreigner' and the model minority. This introspection allowed the participant to trouble the notions that surround these commonly used distinctions. As he (the participant) described, "you don't think you're different until you're openly confronted about it whether it be differences in food, culture, or life at home" (Interview, February 11th, 2022). The participant identified two stereotypes that shaped his reality during his years as a student: the model minority and the 'forever foreigner'. The

participant discussed how the model minority myth affected his schooling: “Oftentimes, my teachers assumed that I ‘got it’ and would not help me. I struggled in certain classes early on because of this assumed academic success and was questioned by these teachers about my struggles in a deficit-minded way” (Interview, February 11th, 2022). Nathan went on to say,

“Over time, the classes I struggled in initially, I worked hard on my own to be high achieving in them. In some way, I guess I perpetuated the stereotype too because that neglect pushed me to be the best so that I would be noticed. I also began to adopt beliefs that I was better than my fellow classmates because of this drive when really I wanted to make sure I never felt neglected again” (Interview, April 1st, 2022).

Although he could identify some of the issues the model minority model can create for Asian Americans, Nathan acknowledged that his neglect at an early stage of his educational career steered him to live out the model in some degree and continue to perpetuate the stereotype as his success in classes led others to believe he was naturally gifted and inclined to academics. The participant also discussed his awakening to being casted as the ‘forever foreigner’:

“Growing up, whenever the teacher asked about our weekends, my white classmates described their weekends and it never seemed to need explanation. Whenever I talked, there was a disconnect because I had to explain the context often” (Interview, February 11th, 2022). Nathan also described incidents from his fellow students that would use racialized speeches towards him and how he felt alienated by it.

“While I never felt any type of shame towards the terms the students would say like ‘ching chong’ or ‘ling long’ or the actions they would take like pulling their eyes back to look like mine, it signaled to me that I was different. I never saw

other students being subjected to such treatment but then again I was the only Asian American in my class. I never went to teachers about this because I didn't know if I should or what would happen if I did" (Interview, April 1st, 2022).

The different incidents described above are just one of many representations of how Asian Americans are constructed to be different from the "norm" and how they are forced to negotiate their identity to conform. Nathan was confronted in an open manner in schools about his racialized difference and in some ways led to a path of conformity in order to avoid the harassment and tensions.

## **Theme 2: Recognition of a Flawed Curriculum**

Second, in reflecting on his own identities and developing ideological stances, Nathan was then able to take that same level of insight to the curriculum and see the lack of civic identity, agency, and membership given to Asian Americans in the accepted historical timeline of the curriculum. He identified the areas he felt were problematic that are often associated with Asian Americans and how the narratives that are provided are almost always involved with conflict and a favorable U.S. depiction as savior. Nathan analyzed the state level curriculum standards of U.S. History from a large, southern state and was only able to find four events involving Asian Americans: Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese mass incarceration during World War II, The Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Moreover, these events were told from the perspective of the United States and neglected the voices of those affected by the events. Nathan felt "troubled and disturbed" by this portrayal, feeling that Asian Americans are only discussed as a problem to the mainstream and dependent on U.S. intervention to correct their foreign culture (Interview, March 4th, 2022).

“Looking at the four times Asian Americans are mentioned in US history, they are all within this context: Chinese Exclusion Act deals with economic exploitation and intervention and the other three events deal with times of war and needed intervention. If there is a theme in this history, it just continues to present us in a light of difference and our perceived need for Americanization” (Interview, March 4th, 2022).

What he described is the danger of the invisibility of experience, which “sends a message that Asian Americans are not legitimate members of the nation and have little place in the country’s history” (Naseem Rodríguez, 2019, p. 216 ). It also reinforces the belief that all Asian ethnic groups experience the same challenges and experience the same history in the United States, “thereby silencing the multiple voices among them” (An, 2017, p. 259). By having such silence and lack of an inclusive narrative, the official school curriculum creates an imperfect, selected narrative of Asian Americans.

Although Nathan’s teaching placement was in economics during the time of the study, he felt it was important to look at the U.S. History standards of the large, southern state because of their ties to standardized state testing. When looking at the standards of economics provided by the large, southern state Nathan was located at, Nathan found that the standards attempted to create a “veil of neutrality” over economics, presenting it in an unbiased manner (Interview, April 25th, 2022). “Looking at a subject like the one I am currently working in (economics), the curriculum is totally devoid of any racial presence in an attempt for curricular neutrality” (Interview, April 25, 2022). Nathan went on to say that in the process of attempting neutrality, what the standards had really accomplished was eliminating ideas that pushed against progress and against capitalism.

**Theme 3: Resistance the Curriculum through Counter Narrative**

Finally, through troubling the Asian American standards, Nathan was able to describe ways in which to resist and disrupt through the use of counter narrative. One way the participant looked to disrupt the narrative was to “make it personal” (Interview, March 4th, 2022). As a Vietnamese American, the participant felt he had stories that were shared by his family that would provide his students understanding of the Vietnam War. The participant stated, “If I make history personal, it may show my students how valuable their personal histories are and how they should be represented in the nation’s narrative” (Interview, March 4th, 2022). The participant discussed examples of rich, personal stories of his family’s time in Vietnam during the war and their immigration to the United States. He shared that “without those stories of my family, I may not have a story to share” (Interview, March 4th, 2022). Another way the participant looked to resist the narrative was to accept and understand that resistance is an active choice. In one of the interviews, the participant described how many teachers at his placement were reluctant to introduce counter narratives because of the work required to find information and because of the lack of expertise in certain areas. He discussed that by making history personal, he would choose to research stories that spoke to others and choose to find ways to disrupt the dominant narrative.

Nathan also described a level of commitment needed by teachers to continue to find stories and information of marginalized communities. During his lesson on unemployment and investigating its effect through a racial lens, Nathan found little data on Asian Americans. While unemployment data was plentiful for groups like African Americans and Latinx Americans throughout the United States, Nathan was unable to find unemployment numbers for Asian Americans in all states. He felt like it represented issues of representation and how Asian Americans were presented overall.

“The lack of (unemployment) data may be indicative of those stereotypes (Model Minority and Forever Foreigner). Looking at it from the foreigner perspective like who cares, they're doing “okay” and they appear to be self-sufficient like, why do we need their numbers? I was pretty disappointed when I looked at the data. I was pretty excited like why don't we include Asians and have students look at it but data wasn't available so I was disappointed that, like we couldn't find data or it's like harder to find data on Asian Americans. I think it plays into a piece I read for a previous class about how Asians are more likely to be invisible within the school system. I mean this lesson I created highlighted those issues that we're just another piece of the cog in the economy, that we don't see or don't measure these groups even though we know they're there and they're contributing. It just pushes me more to know that if I am going to do this work it requires dedication and commitment because of the designed absence” (Interview, April 25th, 2022).

Nathan went on to describe that his disappointment in the lack of information did not mean an end to searching for ways to include narratives of marginalized peoples within the curriculum but a sign that this type of work requires time and commitment in order to be done properly.

## **Findings**

### **Finding 1: AsianCrit and Cultural Citizenship Expansive Potential in Social Studies**

This study and the work of Nathan hopefully provides a broadening of our understanding of Asian Critical Race Theory in Social Studies and Cultural Citizenship through the use of an economic lens. Through cultural citizenship, we see the required acts of reclamation and space-making against the establishment needed to have stories of marginalized communities shared



(Ong, 1996). The current curriculum and the hegemony that oversee it provide a simplified and narrow reality of marginalized peoples. The current story of Asian Americans is exploitive, violent, and over reliant on American culture. It is also spaced out in a way that makes this connection difficult to see at first glance. In order to dispel these notions, Asian Americans need to create a space of empowerment to share their stories.

One way to create this type of space is through the tenets of Asian Crit, which make resistance a possibility (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Through tenets like *Asianizations*, *(re)constructive history*, and *story, theory, and praxis*, Asian Americans can challenge the status quo of the curriculum and provide stories that speak to a more accurate representation of their agency and membership. Even in a curriculum like economics, which is positioned as neutral, there is space through these disciplines to counter the dominant narrative and shed light on marginalized stories (Shanks, 2018). Nathan's work shows how he was able to create dialogue and space to push back on conventional ideas of Asian Americans through attempts of including their perspective in the curriculum.

### **Finding 2: The Detriments of Pan Ethnic Labels/Monikers**

A second contribution that this study provides for the field is shedding light to the detriments that the pan ethnic identity placed on Asian Americans causes and identifies it as a root cause of issues that affect Asian Americans in education. The pan ethnic creates a blanket of invisibility that covers the uniqueness, the individuality, and the cultural difference between different Asian Ethnic groups (An, 2016; Lee, 2022; Naseem Rodriguez, 2018). This invisibility bleeds into the curriculum as it boils down to Asian American experience to limited events and limits the amount of available knowledge/resources to share Asian American experiences (Philip,

2012). This invisibility also has real effects on students in that it normalizes their invisibility to fellow students and faculty (Lee, 2022).

The term “Asian American” erases all cultural identity, agency, and membership that exists within the community and places an expectation and an undue burden created by those in power through admiration of “exceptionalism of Asian Americans” through the idea of the model minority. This mythos creates an undue burden of defined excellence, which is often unattainable, and suggests that Asian Americans that adopt the culture of whiteness will be positioned for success. In this way, the mythos creates a hyper-visibility towards Asian American in that those who do not achieve this perceived academic success are seen as defective or flawed (Lee, 2022; Shah, 2019). This hyper-visibility can also create a hierarchy within the Asian American community in that there are supposed disqualifications from certain groups that do not allow them to ascend to the mantle set by the model minority moniker (Lee, 2009).

The pan ethnic terminology also allows for absence in the dialogue because there are so many groups attached to the term. What is often remembered of them is events that position them in a detrimental light like the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese incarceration. This absence within the curriculum positions Asian Americans as the forever foreigner, unable to ever truly become American and putting additional emphasis that stories and histories that relate to them do not matter in the grand scheme of this country. As the study with Nathan showed, these terms can be imprinted to individuals at a young age and can continue to influence or to burden them until they are ready to be deeply reflective on the troubling nature of these terms. Nathan also shows that with the necessary reflection and needed and nurturing environment, these monikers can be challenged and dismantled.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Limitations**

There are two major limitations to this study that narrow its scope and generalizability: the use of only one participant and limited amount of time spent with observations. In the future, a more robust study could be developed through use of a larger pool of preservice teachers who identify as Asian American within a teacher education program with a focus toward equity and diversity. With the expansion of participants, a more nuanced examination of their racial identity could be performed through the preservice teachers' pedagogical practices.

Addressing the limited time and access to the study's participant, future endeavors should look at preservice teachers' growth over the entirety of their professional development sequence. In the future, by looking at a preservice teacher's growth over their professional development sequence, participants may be able to sit with these ideas and their own identities longer and have time to influence the current curriculum as prescribed to them through their identity.

### **Suggestions**

Since working with a preservice teacher, I have found that teacher preparation programs intent on having a critical focus towards equity and challenging dominant narratives must provide space and resources centering the histories and experiences of Asian Americans. While there is value for Asian American teachers and preservice teachers to share their perspectives and stories, the onus should not entirely be put upon their shoulders. Other potential avenues for this process include creating workshops to learn about Asian American counternarratives or creating opportunities to build curriculum that presents an honest, truthful perspective of the Asian American experience.

## **Epilogue**

This project is not a call for the Asian American perspective to be the sole focus of all new research. We direct more attention, in the form of studies and research, to provide the voice of Asian American within the educational discourse. As noted earlier, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States and yet they are one of the least represented groups in the teaching profession. The need for effective recruitment and retention calls for more understanding by means of research to be done.

Asian Americans have a rich history in the United States and are often absent from the dialogue. What is often remembered of them is events that position them in a detrimental light like the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese incarceration. This absence within the curriculum positions Asian Americans as the forever foreigner, unable to ever truly become American and putting additional emphasis that stories and histories that relate to them do not matter in the grand scheme of this country. Through this work, a road map is hopefully provided to find ways to question the dominant narrative the current curriculum creates and provides a light of affirmation that one's identity matters and that it should be shared.

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**Icons, Panic, & Resistance:  
Using Human Rights Education to Teach LGBTQ+ History**

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**Abstract:** This article outlines the benefits and possibilities of using human rights education (HRE) to promote social justice in history classrooms. A HRE approach helps teachers address sensitive topics, make global connections, build critical consciousness, and frame injustice. Despite the use of human rights rhetoric by activists to name and resist oppression, these applications are rarely employed by K-12 social studies teachers, especially in the United States (NCSS, 2021). Overlooked experiences and contributions of LGBTQ+ advocates during the Civil Rights Movement presents an excellent opportunity to incorporate HRE into social studies classrooms. The article uses LGBTQ+ history in South Africa and the United States to operationalize human rights concepts for practitioners in order to demonstrate the potential of HRE to strengthen democratic citizenship education.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ+ history, human rights education, social justice, citizenship education

**Icons, Panic, & Resistance:  
Using Human Rights Education to Teach LGBTQ+ History**

Human rights education (HRE) has immense potential to develop young citizens who care about social justice; however, little attention has been paid to HRE within social studies education in the United States (Grossman, 2017; NCSS, 2021). Although human rights discourse was a key tool employed by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, human rights are frequently left out of conversations about social justice, particularly in American history classrooms. In fact, leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. explicitly linked African American struggles for equality in the United States with global resistance to imperialism and colonialism (Grant & Gibson, 2013). This omission is important because human rights-focused curriculum and pedagogy can provide counternarratives to versions of United States history that often ignore or downplay homophobia, racism, and other enduring human rights violations. For example, Bullard (1993) argued that environmental racism and housing discrimination against African-Americans should be framed as human rights issues and addressed through citizenship education on a national scale. These assertions were echoed in Mohai & Bryant's (2019) study of the distribution of hazardous waste sites, which disproportionately affected the living conditions of people of color. Similarly, the formal curriculum in the United States generally lacks the inclusion of women's rights as human rights. Crocco's (2007) examination of curricular standards found that approximately half of US states currently address women's rights in some form, but most of these states do not connect women's rights to broader discussions of human rights. The failure of the American schools to prioritize and explicitly address these rights issues represents an enormous opportunity for HRE (Bajaj, 2017; Adami, 2020). Furthermore, strong links between HRE and social justice education have been found by researchers. Spreen and Monaghan (2017) found that HRE supported critical reflection on issues of inequality and difference, and Cislaghi

et al. (2017) found that HRE promoted individual and community action in challenging “unjust social practices” (p. 263).

This article seeks to address the ‘human rights gap’ in social studies education by illustrating how teachers can incorporate human rights into their history and/or civics curriculum. In addition to modeling this pedagogical intervention, this article also aims to incorporate global perspectives that challenge notions of American exceptionalism. The examples provided utilize events from the Civil Rights Movement and are meant to demonstrate how teachers can address social justice from a human rights perspective. The focus on LGBTQ+ history aims to include the experiences of a historically marginalized group whose rare inclusion in curriculum is often deficit-based. The article is also a response to two recent position statements by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) about the need for history teachers to better contextual LGBTQ+ history (2019) and the “importance of teaching and learning about human rights” in social justice education (NCSS, 2021). Furthermore, within the nascent field of HRE, issues of social justice specific to the histories of LGBTQ+ people are less developed than those related to other historically marginalized groups. This condition is currently being exacerbated by political movements in several U.S. states that seek to erase LGBTQ+ experiences from curriculum, amongst other limits on inclusion.

### **Human rights education**

Human rights education (HRE) is learning that develops the knowledge, skills, and values of human rights with the broad goal of creating a universal, shared human rights culture. The goal of HRE is to teach students how to examine their own experiences and actions from a human rights perspective and incorporate human rights concepts into their personal values and decision-making processes (Osler, 2016). Rights-centered knowledge and reflective action are

important because an individual's or a community's actions can potentially have a global impact. Several scholars have made connections between HRE and critical global citizenship education (Bajaj, 2017; Keet, 2020; Tibbits, 2020). Consequently, a human rights approach to education is a way to ensure that students consider their rights and responsibilities to all mankind. The cultivation of such a disposition has the potential to create a more just global society where members recognize that their actions have implications beyond their immediate surroundings, and teachers can play an enormous role in moving the needle in this direction.

It is important to note that the goals and content of human rights, and therefore HRE, are deeply contested. Just as inequalities vary in every society, so do notions of justice (Tibbits, 2020). Stark differences in philosophical and cultural notions of human rights arise within and between nations and groups, often with dominant groups asserting their power to establish convention (Ishay, 2020; Stacy, 2020). Many scholars have argued that the primary means by which the Western world secures the "supremacy of the individual" in national and global contexts has been through constructing and dominating human rights discourse (Sinha, 1981; Ishay, 2008; Iriye, Goedde, & Hitchcock, 2012). Furthermore, Western-dominated institutions have determined what now sits under the umbrella of "human rights" in the UDHR, and the dominance of individualist conceptions of human rights, is at odds with other cultural conceptions of social order. For example, in China, the family- not the individual- is the fundamental social unit. Families are arranged hierarchically, as is the state. The individual's duty is to accept their role in these systems and live according to their ascribed position. Importantly, harmony between men is achieved through conciliation and consensus rather than sanction and majority rule (Sinha, 1981). Similar beliefs can also be found in ancestral customs in the African continent, Sharia law in Islam, the Dharma moral order in Hinduism, and in

several Native American cultures in the United States. A strong argument, therefore, can be made that the current formulation of international human rights constitutes a cultural structure in which Western society finds itself easily at home, but is less aligned with cultural beliefs and practices of non-Western groups. Therefore, HRE and related pursuits must consider context and power imbalances.

### **Benefits of human rights education**

A human rights approach to social studies instruction offers several pedagogical benefits for teachers and students. First, HRE can provide a conceptual tool for teachers to frame “bad events” in history classrooms. Sometimes, history instruction can be presented or sequenced as a series of isolated, unfortunate upheavals (World War I, Great Depression, World War II). HRE provides teachers and students with a structural approach to deconstruct these events and establish relationships amongst them. Second, a HRE framework can help teachers address difficult histories or potentially sensitive topics. By using clear definitions of human rights and parallel global examples, teachers can present these topics in a way that allows students to connect them to human rights issues without focusing explicitly on the areas of controversy. This technique may be appealing to teachers that are hesitant to present and/or discuss controversial issues by the use of this more “neutral” framing. Third, HRE gives social studies teachers a way to get their students thinking beyond the borders of the United States, and possibly challenge notions of American exceptionalism. Human rights violations are often framed as happening outside of one’s country, with little attention given to domestic human rights issues (Hahn, 2020). The strategy of making connections between global human rights ideals and domestic human rights violations has been used by activists in the past to gain allies and illuminate injustice in America. If social studies teachers adopt a similar strategy, it may help students

reevaluate dominant narratives in U.S. history. Furthermore, critical discussions of human rights concepts and related concerns can foster decolonizing educational practices *within HRE* (Zembylas, 2020). Finally, HRE gives us a sense of being human and emphasizes our shared humanity. By advocating for a universal rights culture, HRE can provide structure for normative judgments about fairness and injustice in order to allow more of humanity to live the “good life.”

### **Key human rights concepts**

No discussion of human rights or HRE can proceed without reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is the most widely accepted standard of human rights and the United Nations codified it on December 10, 1948, three years after the organization was chartered in 1945. December 10 has since been celebrated annually as Human Rights Day since 1950. Though not legally binding, the UDHR contains thirty articles that enumerate the key tenets that constitute the core of human rights discourse worldwide. Consequently, scholars have advocated for the use of international agreements like the UDHR in classrooms to help students gain a better understanding of human rights issues (Osler & Starkey, 2010; Zembylas & Keet, 2020).

The UDHR contains what scholars refer to as both negative and positive rights. Negative rights are rights that oblige inaction, meaning these rights exist unless someone (or a group or government) negates them. A negative right forbids others from acting against the holder of the right. Examples of negative rights include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, or freedom from slavery, and the right to life. Positive rights are rights that oblige action, meaning these rights will not exist unless an action is taken by a person, group, or government (Farinacci-Fernos, 2018). In order for a positive right to be exercised, someone else’s action must be added to the equation. Examples of positive rights include the right to education, the right to food and

housing, and the right to healthcare. The distinction between, and the use of, positive and negative rights have important implications when addressing advocacy issues, often called “transformative action” in citizenship frameworks. Also, since HRE seeks to promote rights-based activism, the concept of positive rights can expand possibilities for action beyond the more basic freedoms that fit into the category of negative rights.

### **Civil rights education**

Social studies curriculum in the United States often fails to frame civil rights issues, such as inequality and oppression, as human rights issues. Despite the clear relationship between human rights history and the Civil Rights Movement, these connections are rare in social studies classrooms (Grant & Gibson, 2013). Instead, patriotic, uncritical stories of American success and exceptionalism are dominant. Nelson and Pang (2006), for example, argued that there is a disconnect between these traditional narratives and the lived experiences of many Americans: “Social studies curriculum does a poor job of examining the disparity between the American credo and pervasiveness of racism in the American experience” (p. 129). In contrast to how the Civil Rights movement is portrayed in U.S. social studies curricula and textbooks, both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X intentionally used human rights discourse to frame their goals during the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, the NAACP used quotations from the UDHR to shame the U.S. government into living up to a document it played a major role in creating. Additionally, King’s (2020) principle of Black Agency, Resistance, and Perseverance in his model of Black Historical Consciousness is useful in framing the role of human rights approaches during the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, Native Americans used human rights doctrines as grounds to pursue social justice and reparations during the Civil Rights Era (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). LGBTQ+ history has been interpreted through a human rights lens, however, very

few empirical studies or practitioner articles exist in social studies education that examine LGBTQ+-related discrimination during the Civil Rights Movement through a HRE framework.

### **Methodology**

The primary goal of this article is to model how a HRE framework can be utilized to frame oppression and inequality. In the sections that follow, with the goal of broadening notions of human rights concepts and deepening knowledge of LGBTQ+ history in social studies classrooms, I give suggestions for making global connections between parallel human rights issues and HRE. First, I use the Lavender Scare, an often-overlooked episode in U.S. history, to introduce key human rights issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement. This section is meant to illuminate human rights violations in the United States, which serves as a counternarrative to aforementioned renditions of American history often observed by social studies researchers where teachers and curriculum portray human rights transgressions as occurring outside of the U.S. Critical HRE can interrupt such notions. Second, the events in Johannesburg and New York City were chosen for their similarities. The discrimination and violent oppression faced by LGBTQ+ people in the United States and South Africa share several characteristics, which is useful in scaffolding analysis of inequality in social studies classrooms. For example, the state violence and intimidation driven by heteronormativity and homophobia were apparent in Forrest Town and at the Stonewall Inn. Also, the activism and pursuit of dignity born out of these events provide additional symmetry, most notably through the transformational citizenship practices of Michel Bruno and Storme DeLarverie. This comparative approach to LGBTQ+ history adds a global dimension to Civil Rights curriculum. Following the human rights issues raised in each of these histories, connections are made to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



## **The Lavender Scare & HRE**

The moral panic about LGBTQ+ people working in the United States government that coincided with the early Civil Rights Movement provides a foundational context for critical history that can be taught with a HRE framework. The Lavender Scare refers to the mass dismissal of LGBTQ+ workers from government service in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and their continued discrimination in the workplace into the 1970s. Drawing parallels to the Red Scares, in which Americans (spearheaded by politicians) feared communist infiltration and subversion of key social and political organizations, the Lavender Scare focused the presence of LGBTQ+ people in such institutions. Many Americans believed that LGBTQ+ people serving the country would make their institutions weaker, as they might be more susceptible to blackmail or coercion as well as be communist sympathizers. Many politicians in the late 1940s and 1950s ran on anti-LGBTQ+ platforms, promising to cleanse the government of their presence. In 1947, the US State Department cited security concerns in its purge of LGBTQ+ workers from its ranks. Thousands of job applicants would soon be denied employment at government agencies due to allegations of homosexuality. The key legislation associated with the Lavender Scare was Executive Order 10450, issued by President Eisenhower in 1953. The order formally expanded security criteria to include sexual orientation as a pertinent consideration for all government positions and grounds for termination. Until its reversal in 1973, approximately 5,000 LGBTQ+ people were fired from federal employment. Many of them were also outed in a highly public manner. Executive Order 10450 also set a precedent for similar state-level legislation and policies in private institutions. For example, in the late 1950s, the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee turned its attention to LGBTQ+ people as targets for “subversive activity” when looking to undermine civil rights organizations after tying activists to

communism proved difficult. Many students and professors at the University of Florida were forced to drop out or resign as a result of the committee's actions. Once again, many of these people were publicly outed.

### **Using a HRE Approach**

HRE can contextualize the Lavender Scare and help teachers frame historical and contemporary issues of social justice for their students. Article 23 of the UNDR reads, “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protections against unemployment.” This provision provides a clear example of the human rights violations perpetrated during the Lavender Scare. Furthermore, Article 21 expresses the most specific human rights violation inflicted upon LGBTQ+ people: “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country...Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.” Executive Order 10450 and similar legislation are contradictory to the rights enumerated in the UDHR. Additionally, other violations can be connected to Article 7 (equal protection under the law), Article 26 (right to education), Article 12 (protection against attacks upon honor and reputation). Lastly, the public outing of LGBTQ+ people can be framed as a security issue. Disclosing an LGBTQ+ person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to discredit them is a violation of privacy and may put their security at risk (Article 3). This strategy was employed throughout the Lavender Scare and put an already vulnerable population in additional danger.

### **LGBTQ+ rights as human rights in South Africa and the United States**

In order to illustrate human rights issues faced by LGBTQ+ people around the globe, teachers can utilize historical and contemporary acts of resistance to oppression. By engaging students with LGBTQ+ struggles for acceptance and inclusion, social studies teachers can

demonstrate the similar experiences and traumas of LGBTQ+ groups in the United States and South Africa. Framing LGBTQ+ rights as human rights helps social studies teachers create space for more critical evaluations of events that are often overlooked or whitewashed, which may lead to greater levels of empathy and allyship on issues of social justice faced by LGBTQ+ populations worldwide.

While South African police had conducted previous raids on public and private LGBTQ+ gatherings, the events that occurred in Forest Town, South Africa on January 22, 1966 thrust the LGBTQ+ community in the country into the spotlight like never before. The party in Forest Town was an opulent gathering of prominent members of the gay community in one of the most exclusive suburbs of Johannesburg. Approximately 300-400 people were at the party when undercover police officers raided the premises and arrested nine people on charges ranging from “gross indecency” to the illegal sale of liquor. The news coverage that followed the Forest Town Raid was highly sensationalized (Gunkel, 2010). One outlet described the gathering as a “mass sex orgy,” while another newspaper printed the names and personal information of attendees. The media did much to create a climate of fear of “deviant lifestyles,” and some worried that homosexuality posed an existential threat to the White community in South Africa (Cameron & Gevisser, 2013). Anti-gay legislation, which criminalized broad conceptions of homosexuality (not only homosexual acts) was passed in the national legislature the following year. In response to the raids and new legislation, the LGBTQ+ community coalesced to fight increasingly aggressive measures that attacked their dignity. Activists created the Homosexual Law Reform Fund to raise money for a legal team that could challenge these new laws in court. Despite these efforts, additional amendments to the Immorality Act were passed in 1969. Much of the

legislation passed after the Forest Town Raid stayed on the books in South Africa until 1994, when homosexuality was decriminalized (nine years after interracial marriages were sanctioned).

The most prominent person arrested during the Forest Town Raid was Michel Bruno. Booked by police for “masquerading as a woman,” Bruno had been a high-profile drag queen among the gay elite in the 1960s. Born in Johannesburg in 1941 to Italian immigrant parents, Bruno, who used male pronouns, quickly became one of the most prominent advocates for LGBTQ+ rights on the African continent and would remain influential until his death in 2016 (Cameron & Gevisser, 2013). At the age of nineteen he featured in and helped organize the first commercial drag show in South Africa. Prior to the raid, Bruno worked as a hairdresser and a key organizer for LGBTQ+ life in Johannesburg. Following his arrest in Forest Town, Bruno became the focus of anti-gay slurs and propaganda. His photograph and personal information were circulated throughout the country by those who feared that LGBTQ+ people threatened South Africa’s national security. When Bruno received death threats and his hair salon was vandalized, the LGBTQ+ community coalesced around the 25-year-old. He used this support to build the Homosexual Law Reform Fund and became a symbol of resistance to homophobia across the rigid racial lines that generally divided South Africans (Gunkel, 2010). Despite the anti-gay legislation passed in 1969, Bruno’s coalition succeeded in organizing several well-supported events for LGBTQ+ people across in Johannesburg that same year. This included the first Miss Gay South Africa competition, which he won. For fifty years after Forest Town, Bruno worked as a hairdresser and activist in South Africa, receiving many tributes as the result of his advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights. Since his passing, Bruno is honored each year at the Johannesburg Pride Parade, the first of which he spearheaded in 1990.

The Forest Town Raid demonstrates the similar experiences of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa with those in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement. The Stonewall Uprising serves as an unfortunate but similar parallel to the indignities suffered by LGBTQ+ people in America in their struggle to exercise basic human rights. The precipitating event occurred in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. The Stonewall Inn was a popular gay bar in the late 1960s, when police raids on such bars were commonplace. On the Friday night in question, police entered the tavern for a routine bust at 1:20am. The approximately 200 patrons inside were ordered to produce identification. After some customers objected to commands that those dressed as women be inspected by female police officers in the bathroom to verify their sex, almost all of the clientele refused to comply with further orders. Soon, women being searched by police accused officers of inappropriate frisking, and violence ensued. Police were witnessed assaulting several detainees before patrons began to fight back. Before long there was a crowd outside of the Stonewall Inn witnessing battered people leave the bar as others were whisked away in patrol wagons. The police tried to restrain the crowd by knocking bystanders down with nightsticks. Some officers fled the scene, now with over 500 onlookers, in patrol cars with slashed tires attempting to be overturned. Remaining officers, now surrounded, indiscriminately struck members of the crowd before barricading themselves inside the bar. For approximately 45 minutes, a growing and angry mob threw garbage, bricks, and other projectiles through the broken windows of the Stonewall Inn. Eventually the Tactical Police Force of New York City arrived to free the officers. Violence and arrests continued until approximately 4:00am. Larger riots occurred the following night and sporadic physical altercations continued in the neighborhood and near other gay bars in New York City for the next five days.

One woman, whose assault by police was witnessed by the gathering crowd outside of the Stonewall Inn on that infamous night, became a gay icon in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. Storme DeLarverie's role during and after the Stonewall Uprising shares many similarities with that of Michel Bruno's in South Africa. Born to a Black mother and White father, DeLarverie was a biracial woman who described herself as a "butch lesbian." Prior to her presence at Stonewall, she had been an entertainer in various shows, ranging from the Ringling Brothers Circus to an MC and singer at NYC venues such as the Apollo Theatre and Radio City Music Hall. DeLarverie was well-known around Greenwich Village as an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. When she fought back against the officers who were dragging her out of the Stonewall Inn, it took four policemen to restrain her and DeLarverie's head was bleeding from multiple baton strikes when she was finally corralled into the patrol wagon. According to eyewitness accounts, this sight sent the crowd into a frenzy and ignited the more serious violence. Already a highly visible member of the local neighborhood and known throughout the greater New York City LGBTQ+ community, DeLarverie became a beloved symbol of resistance. From her position as a performing artist, fashion icon, and bouncer at lesbian bars, she played a key role in the gay liberation movement that followed the Stonewall Uprising. Until her death in 2014 at age 85, Storme DeLarverie was an influential advocate for LGBTQ+ rights both in the United States and abroad. In 2019, she was part of the inaugural class inducted on the National LGBTQ+ Wall of Honor located within the Stonewall National Monument in part of the former Stonewall Inn.

### **Using a HRE Approach**

An HRE approach to LGBTQ+ history in social studies classrooms can help students make connections between oppression and resistance during the Civil Rights Movement through

a global lens. The UDHR provides a way to ground and evaluate claims about human rights raised by the aforementioned histories. A useful starting point is Article 2 of the UDHR, which reads, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status.” Emphasizing to students that human rights apply to *all* people is an important foundation to lay for subsequent analyses of rights issues. Teachers must be clear that human rights are universal and without exception. Next, clearer connections can be made with more specific articles in the UDHR. For example, Article 20 stipulates, “Everyone has the right to peaceful assembly and association,” and Article 12 protects against interference with privacy. Those at the Forest Town party and Stonewall Inn were clearly unable to exercise these rights. They were victims of discrimination by law enforcement and the larger legal system in their respective countries. These raids on LGBTQ+ gatherings were commonplace, demonstrating a systemic denial of human rights. Furthermore, the police brutality during the arrests at Stonewall violated Article 5, which protects against degrading treatment, and the circulation of the names of other personal information by the South African media of those detained in Forest Town infringes upon the “security of person” stated in Article 3. Both of these raids violate Article 9, which protects against arbitrary arrest. Lastly, the dehumanizing ways in which LGBTQ+ people are treated in these raids can perhaps best be framed by Article 27, which states, “Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community...” The inability for these individuals to enjoy rest and leisure (also protected by Article 24) with their chosen associates illustrates a clear human rights violation of the cultural variety. Protections against physical violence are of course vital, but the infringements upon cultural rights must also be named. This allows students to view human

rights in a more holistic manner, so that when issues of LGBTQ+ representation, mental health, and education are raised, they are ready to engage with perspectives on equity in areas that fall into the category of positive rights.

### **Connections with NCSS standards**

The human rights education framework outlined in this article as a way to teach for social justice is aligned with the two sets of standards created by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) for K-12 classrooms. In the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, the NCSS lays out ten ‘themes of social studies.’ Several of these themes connect to the curriculum and pedagogy presented regarding the teaching of LGBTQ+ history. First, the Global Connections theme is supported by the comparative format used to teach about the Forest Town Raid and Stonewall Uprising, as well as prominent icons of these events. This format utilizes a strength of the HRE framework to globalize curriculum. Second, the Civic Ideals and Practices theme states, “Through social studies programs, students acquire a historical and contemporary understanding of the basic freedoms and rights of citizens in a democracy, and learn about the institutions and practices that support and protect these freedoms and rights.” The use of the UDHR as a basis for the evaluation of citizenship practices supports this instruction. Third, a focus on LGBTQ+ history as a way for students to develop a deeper appreciation for diverse ways of living aligns with the theme of Culture. Lastly, the activists highlighted exemplify the activism and courage described in the Power, Authority, and Governance theme that asks students to analyze how individuals can produce social change.

In the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards, the NCSS highlights the importance of teaching disciplinary knowledge in four areas of social studies education: Civics, Economics, Geography, and History. Using a HRE



framework to teach about social justice issues, such as LGBTQ+ history, addresses at least two of these areas. In the Civics section, students are asked to evaluate social and political institutions, public policies, and barriers to democratic participation. HRE, as outlined in this article, can accomplish these aims, since human rights are closely tied to principles of democratic citizenship education. Additionally, in the History section, students are asked to demonstrate critical analysis of multiple perspectives in history as well as place events in broader historical context. Situating the LGBTQ+ rights movement within and Civil Rights Movement through a human rights lens allows for this form of inquiry.

### **Enrichment Curriculum**

This section includes links to media sources that can be used to further develop knowledge and awareness regarding LGBTQ+ issues, both past and present. The [first video](#) chronicles how the Stonewall Uprising sparked a broader social movement in the LGBTQ+ community. It includes information about the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people in the 1950s and 1960s, footage from the riots and ensuing protests, and a look at the legacy of the activism that followed the events at the Stonewall Inn. The [second video](#) includes a 2022 interview with a leading historian of LGBTQ+ history. He describes the importance of the Stonewall Uprising to the LGBTQ+ community's pursuit of basic human rights and provides perspective on current issues faced by LGBTQ+ people. Viewing guides are provided as appendices for these two videos. Additionally, the National Park Service made a [15-part video series](#) on the Stonewall Inn in 2021 to celebrate the monument's five-year anniversary. These videos include interviews with park rangers, historians, activists, and former Stonewall patrons.

**Conclusion**

Human rights education has the potential to globalize social studies curriculum and promote social justice. A human rights education approach allows teachers to address sensitive topics, make global connections, promote critical perspectives, and frame injustice by emphasizing the value of human dignity. Through the use of comparative examples and critical analysis, HRE can serve as a conceptual tool to frame global and local rights issues through disciplined inquiry. While global awareness is certainly a welcome outcome of this approach, the ability of HRE to concretize human rights violations closer to home is perhaps its most significant benefit. This article demonstrates the presence of human rights transgressions within the United States so that social studies teachers can challenge notions of American exceptionalism and provide future citizens with actionable goals of social justice.

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**Appendix A: How Stonewall Sparked a Movement, Viewing Guide**[History Channel: How Stonewall sparked a movement](#)

1. Why are the ‘Stonewall Riots’ considered a key moment in the Gay Rights Movement?
2. In how many states was homosexuality illegal in the 1950s and 1960s?
3. What threats were faced by LGBTQ+ people during the 1950s and 1960s?
4. Why did LGBTQ+ people patronize bars like the Stonewall Inn?
5. Who owned the Stonewall Inn? How did these people take advantage of their customers?
6. Why might a patron at the Stonewall Inn be arrested?
7. Why did the riots begin at Stonewall?
8. How long did the riots at the Stonewall Inn last?
9. How did the events at Stonewall spark a movement for LGBTQ+ rights?
10. What was the mission of the Gay Liberation Front?
11. When was the first Gay Pride Parade? Why was this day chosen?
12. When was the Stonewall Inn made a National Monument? Why was this designation significant for the LGBTQ+ community?

**Appendix B: Remembering Stonewall, Viewing Guide**[CBS News: Remembering Stonewall 53 year later \(2022\)](#)

1. Why does Marc Stein, the historian being interviewed, say that the Stonewall Inn was raided by police?
2. How long did protests last after the riots at Stonewall?
3. According to Marc Stein, what victories have been won by the LGBTQ+ community since 1969?
4. What are the current priorities of LGBTQ+ rights activists?
5. What issues have been raised for the LGBTQ+ community by recent Supreme Court decisions?
6. What members of the LGBTQ+ community are particularly vulnerable?

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**Designing Civic Engagement Questions:  
Strategies for Student-Centered Classroom Discussions using Open  
Access e-Book Resources**

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**Abstract:** The overarching goal of civics education in K-12 schools is encouraging students to become active and engaged members of school, local, national, and global communities – a goal that has become increasingly difficult to achieve in today’s contentious and polarizing political climates. Highlighting civic engagement questions available in the free and open access e-book *Building Democracy for All: Interactive Explorations of Government and Civic Life*, we offer ideas for designing and implementing civic engagement questions that focus on public and educational policy issues as an entry point for students learning about civics, government, and their roles as community members. We include examples of student-centered civic engagement questions along with strategies for how educators can utilize them in classrooms.

**Keywords:** civic learning, student engagement, OER, public policy, teaching methods



### **Designing Civic Engagement Questions: Strategies for Student-Centered Classroom Discussions using Open Access e-book Resources**

The goal of education in civics and government is informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy (National Standards for Civics and Government, Center for Civic Education, n.d., para 1).

When students think critically, investigate thoughtfully, and exchange views respectfully about issues that matter, they learn to become civically engaged community members. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. powerfully stated: “School is one of the first places where society as a whole begins to shape our sense of what it means to be an American. It is in our schools that we learn the first civics lessons that either reinforce or counter the myths and fables we gleaned at home” (2023, para. 3). For Gates, students becoming critical thinkers about government, politics, and history is the goal of K-12 civic education.

But in schools today, beset by political tensions, systemic inequalities, COVID-19 pandemic impacts, and the accelerated spread of misinformation, teaching civics and government classes has become enormously complicated. Many students lack the skills to understand and assess the political information they get from social and print media (Breakstone et.al., 2021). The most recent 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show the lowest ever history test scores and the first-ever drop in civics scores (Carrillo, 2023). Teachers are searching for approaches that will support students in learning how to think critically about the educational and public policy choices facing themselves, their schools, their families, and their communities.

In this article, we show strategies for engaging social studies, history, and civics students in analyzing relevant-to-them educational and public policy questions through discussion, writing, and civic action projects. Highlighting civic engagement questions available in the free and open access e-book *Building Democracy for All: Interactive Explorations of Government and Civic Life*, we discuss how to invite students to think deeply about the choices they face and the decisions they will make as civically engaged members of school, local, and national communities (Maloy & Trust, 2020). In writing the *Building Democracy for All* e-book, and beginning to use it in classrooms, we have found that designing effective civic engagement questions can be complex and challenging in today's political climate; especially when students' preset, and potentially entrenched, positions on issues can stymie and frustrate classroom discussions. Thus, in this article, we share our learning to help teachers guide students in thinking and acting as civically-minded members of their communities.

### **Goals and Complexities of Civic Education**

The broad goal of K-12 civics education is developing students' civic-minded dispositions and a readiness to engage in community-based civic actions (Baumi, Quinn, & LeCompte, 2023; Palmer, 2011). Students engaging in inquiry-based explorations and investigations of policy issues is a centerpiece of civics learning (Harvey & Daniels, 2015; Matto, et al., 2017; Thomas, 2022; Zemelman, 2016). In its recent position statement, the National Council for the Social Studies stated that to build classrooms that are "laboratories for democracy," teachers and students need to establish instructional practices "where the exploration of ideas, opposing viewpoints, and perspective-taking expand learner agency and

engender a sense of belonging and interdependence” (2023, para. 2, 6). Guided discussions and policy debates among students are a key strategy for civic learning, especially when such instructional formats establish safe classroom environments where students explore relevant political issues while increasing political learning (Hogan et al., 2016). But few teachers implement these types of participatory pedagogies on a consistent basis in history, social studies, and civics classrooms (Hanson et al., 2018; Littenberg-Tobias, 2021; McNeil, 1988). It is also the case that discussion and debate as teaching methods can be short circuited when the issues being discussed become so controversial and politicized that some students are unwilling to listen to or consider different sides of the issues (Hess & McAvoy, 2014).

In classrooms today, teachers face the challenge of formulating civic engagement questions and conducting discussions and explorations that will encourage students to investigate authentic and relevant public policy, societal, and educational issues, analyze documents and existing policies, consider proposals for change, design potential solutions, develop their own positions and perspectives, and create knowledge to share with others. Teachers need questions that will interest and engage students but will be less likely to devolve into contentious debates based on personal opinions or social media-based simplifications of information. Teachers cannot completely avoid large-scale national political controversies, such as presidential impeachment or mandated COVID-19 masking and vaccinations, but instead they can frame these hot-button issues so students understand competing viewpoints through discussion and dialogue. In every case, the goal is for students to explore topics respectfully, thoughtfully, democratically.

### **An e-book for Civic Learning**

Responding to the need for active student engagement in civic learning, and following the publication of the revised 8th grade civics and government framework in Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018), we began writing the e-book *Building Democracy for All* – an interactive, multimodal, multicultural, open educational resource through which students can explore key topics in civics, media, and democracy. Open educational resources (OER) are “teaching, learning, and research materials that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others” (Creative Commons, n.d., para. 3). We designed the e-book as an OER to democratize access to learning – that is, we wanted to ensure that every student, teacher, and individual interested in the content of the e-book could freely access it anytime and from anywhere.

We organized the e-book around the Massachusetts 8th grade curriculum, which consists of 52 learning standards across the following 7 topics: 1) Philosophical Foundations of the U.S. Political System; 2) Development of the U.S. Government; 3) Branches of the Government and Separation of Powers; 4) Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens; 5) Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court Decisions; 6) Structure of Massachusetts State and Local Government; 7) Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy. We included curricular cross-links throughout the book to showcase the connections between the 8th grade curriculum and curriculum designed for other grade levels in our state and nation, including Grade 3: Massachusetts, Home to Many Different People; Grade 5: U.S. History to Civil War and Modern Civil Rights Movement; and U.S. History I & II and AP Civics and Government for high school students.

We designed a chapter for each of the 52 civics learning standards that included three sections: 1) INVESTIGATE, 2) UNCOVER, and 3) ENGAGE. The INVESTIGATE section offers students and teachers opportunities to explore specific topics in the state framework. The UNCOVER section focuses on going beyond the state framework, curriculum materials, and traditional textbooks to learn hidden histories and untold stories about people and events. The ENGAGE section places students in the roles of citizen and community decision-makers who must understand and make choices about relevant educational and public policy questions. To promote active student engagement with issues of public and educational policy, each ENGAGE section is organized around an engagement question for students to explore, discuss, and when possible, act upon. Framing issues in the form of a question signified that the topic was open for dialogue and debate to reinforce the principle that, in democracy, everyone's viewpoint matters to how policies get decided.

### **Developing Civic Engagement Questions for Students**

For “Topic 1: Philosophical Foundations of the United States Political System” from the Massachusetts 8th grade civic and government standards, we developed five ENGAGE questions – one for each of the five standards within this topic. In Table 1, the left-hand column lists the state learning standard; the right-hand column shows a civic engagement question based on the standard.

**Table 1**

*Learning Standards for Massachusetts 8th Grade Topic 1*

**Learning Standard Civic Engagement Question**

<i>Explain why the Founders of the United States considered the government of ancient Athens to be the beginning of democracy and explain how the democratic concepts developed in ancient Greece influenced modern democracy.</i>	How Can Teachers and Students Collaborate to Build More Democratic Classrooms?
<i>Describe the government of the Roman Republic and the aspects of republican principles that are evident in modern governments.</i>	What Law-Related Latin Words and Phrases Does Every Student Need to Know?
<i>Explain the influence of Enlightenment thinkers on the American Revolution and the framework of American government.</i>	What Educational Opportunities Would You Create to Promote the Political Ambitions of Young Girls?
<i>Explain how British ideas about and practices of government influenced the American colonists and the political institutions that developed in colonial America.</i>	Should 16-Year-Olds and/or 17-Year-Olds Be Allowed to Vote?
<i>Analyze the evidence for arguments that the principles of the system of government of the United States were influenced by the governments of Native Peoples.</i>	Who Decides When to Restore Native American Names for Geographic Places?

Each civic engagement question was written to activate student interest without ignoring or avoiding important social and political policy issues and systematic societal inequalities. Asking how to build more democratic classrooms, what law and government-related Latin

words and phrases every person needs to know, how to promote more involvement of young girls in politics, whether 16- or 17-year-olds should be allowed to vote, and when should communities restore original Native American names to geographic places puts students in the roles of civic minded decision-makers. We imagined teachers using each question as it is written or creating their own variations to guide students in researching different sides, listening to multiple viewpoints, and making up their own minds about what next steps they would take as engaged community members.

Table 2 presents civic engagement questions for “Topic 7: Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy” from the Massachusetts 8th grade civics and government standards. As with our approach to Topic 1, we generated a public or educational policy question for each standard as a starting point for expanded discussion, research, and exploration. In formulating engagement questions for Topic 7, we focused on the immense presence that digital and social media have in the lives of students, and the difficulties young people face in distinguishing between reliable sources and fake and false news. Each of the engagement questions are designed to ignite conversations that help students become informed thinkers and engaged decision-makers as they interact with news sources and social media to learn about in school, local, and national issues.

**Table 2***Learning Standards for Massachusetts 8th Grade Topic 7*

<i>Explain why freedom of the press was included as a right in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and in Article 16 of the Massachusetts Constitution; explain that freedom of the press means the right to express and publish views on politics and other topics without government sponsorship, oversight, control or censorship.</i>	What Speech Rights Should Student Journalists Have at School?
<i>Give examples of how a free press can provide competing information and views about government and politics.</i>	How Can Every Citizen Become Their Own Investigative Journalist?
<i>Explain the different functions of news articles, editorials, editorial cartoons, and “op-ed” commentaries.</i>	How Are War Correspondents and War Photographers Essential to a Free Press?
<i>Evaluate the benefits and challenges of digital news and social media to a democratic society.</i>	Is Internet Access a Human Right?
<i>Explain methods for evaluating information and opinion in print and online media.</i>	How Can Students Become Fact Checkers Who Evaluate the Credibility of News?
<i>Analyze the point of view and evaluate the claims of an editorial, editorial cartoon, or op-ed commentary on a public issue at the local, state or national level.</i>	Should Facebook and Other Technology Companies Be Required to Regulate Political Content on their Social Media Platforms?

Civic engagement questions in the other chapters of the book also focused on policy questions that we felt students would find interesting and relevant to their lives as members of multiple communities; here are selected examples:



- What Supreme Court Cases Should All Teenagers Know?
- How Would You Get More People, Especially Young People, to Vote?
- Would You Join a Consumer Boycott or Buycott to Promote Change?
- What are and Should be Students' Rights at School?
- What New Constitutional Amendments Would You Propose?
- What Single-Use Plastic Items Should Local Governments Ban to Help Save the Environment?
- Is It Time to Adopt Instant Runoff/Ranked Choice Voting?
- Should Fred Korematsu and Other Individuals Who Fought for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Have a National Day of Recognition?
- How Can Books and Music Express Political Protests?

### **Piloting Civic Engagement Questions: A Classroom Example**

In fall 2022, one of the co-authors of this article – an 8th grade teacher – and students at a local middle school piloted some of the civic engagement questions as part of their study of the United States’ political system and Topic 1 of the state’s 8th grade civics and government standards (“Philosophical Foundations of the United States Political System”). We did not design this pilot as a formal research study with questionnaires and statistical data collection. Rather, the teacher kept classroom observation notes, reviewed student work, and wrote learning plans and teaching reflections as part of assignments for a graduate-level history and social studies teaching methods class. Based on the teacher’s self-reports, we developed the following summary of how students interacted with the civic engagement questions and e-book resources in the classroom.

Students began the unit by exploring connections between past and present forms of political organization, which led to the topic of voting – focusing on who did, and who did not, vote in recent national and statewide elections. They turned to the 2022 midterm elections in November to further address the role of voting and the electoral voice that citizens have in a democratic system of government. Looking at learning resources provided in the *Building Democracy for All* e-book, students collaboratively reviewed videos, audio clips, and primary and secondary sources that discussed why it is important for citizens to vote once they have reached voting age. When students began exploring these learning materials, they were asked to consider the following engagement question: “Should 16-Year-Olds and/or 17-Year-Olds Be Allowed to Vote?” After discussing the different views about the importance of voting, students formulated their own written opinions on the voting age question.

Across the teacher’s classes, only a small number of students favored a lower voting age. Most students across the different sections of the teacher’s classes were adamant in their responses that the United States should keep the age to vote right where it is at 18 years old. Some expressed their view that people younger than 18 do not pay enough attention to political and social issues to have a good enough grasp about what is happening in the political landscape to make an informed decision when it comes to voting. Others contended that when people younger than 18 discuss politics, many are just taking the views of parents, older siblings, grandparents, or another older adult figure in their lives. These students believed many of their peers were simply reusing the opinions of adults, and not really thinking for themselves. The teacher then asked students to research voting rules, voting reform initiatives, and voting practices in their local communities as well as in other states and countries as ways to expand

the scope of civic learning.

### **Utilizing e-Book Resources and Civic Engagement Questions: Strategies for Teachers**

In the previous example, students' civic learning was launched by an ENGAGE question that was interesting, relevant, and meaningful to them. Students then expanded their thinking and understanding by exploring materials, media, and resources from the *Building Democracy for All* e-book. In this section, we offer the following strategies for how social studies educators can begin utilizing e-books, civic engagement questions, and related digital resources to promote civic learning in their classes.

#### **1. Design questions that recruit and sustain student interest and engage students through discussion, dialog and debate.**

Designing questions that generate and sustain student interest is essential to inclusive and accessible teaching and learning, one of the foundational principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL; CAST, Inc., 2018a). According to CAST, Inc., “information that is not attended to, that does not engage learners’ cognition, is in fact inaccessible” (2018b, para. 1). The UDL principles are intended to break down barriers to learning. One of the three main UDL principles – Multiple Means of Engagement – focuses on the importance of recruiting and sustaining interest, in part by creating learning activities that students are interested in and excited about.

We sought to design ENGAGE questions that would recruit and sustain student interest by focusing on current events and topics that were meaningful to students. For example, while the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are important topics in state curriculum frameworks, students often do not see the relevance or meaningfulness to them as learners and community members. To attract students’ interest about the Constitution and the Bill of

Rights, we crafted the question: “What Are and Should Be Students' Rights at School?” This question brings a large, often abstract, constitutional topic into immediate and personal focus for students in a classroom setting. Drawing on their own experiences regarding rights in schools and researching the topic, students can discuss what rights they believe they have, what rights they have, and what rights they think they should have.

When designing civic engagement questions, it is important to avoid framing civic issues solely as “Yes/No” or “Either/Or” propositions where students are asked to choose one side or the other in a classroom debate activity. While “Yes/No” debates can be useful in stimulating student interest, that approach can reduce complex topics to an oversimplified view of a topic. For example, asking students whether they should have the right to post whatever they want on social media outside of school time (including profanity) without consequences at school might lead to heated Yes/No debate rather than a thoughtful conversation that encourages an investigation of constitutional rights and social media ethics and etiquette.

An extended goal is to have students learn about differing perspectives and consider multiple alternative ways to address issues and problems. Being able to think broadly and solve problems creatively are essential features of students’ roles as citizens and members of multiple communities. When learning about political protest in a democracy, instead of focusing on whether a group should or should not protest a specific policy, students might be asked, “How can books or music express political protest?” Framing protest in broader terms encourages students to research different ways protest has been used to promote change, including how antiwar literature and protest music impacted people’s attitudes and government policies.

## **2. Utilize Digital Spaces for Civic Engagement Research and Investigation**

We suggest that teachers have students investigate open-ended civic engagement questions, at least initially, within a teacher-developed digital space. In our case, an e-book was that digital space. Having students begin exploring the online resources we had chosen gave us confidence that students would access historically accurate, factually reliable resources as they considered each engagement question. Students can certainly go beyond e-book resources, but by beginning with the e-book, students had a common framework of teacher-chosen and vetted information as a starting point for learning. Of course, teachers do not need to write entire e books to achieve this goal. Any teacher-developed digital space – wikis, Google slides, Google docs, Wakelet wakes, Padlet walls – can serve a similar purpose of providing students with reliable resources for engagement with and exploration of civic topics and issues.











## **3. Utilize Digital Choice Boards for Deeper Investigations**

The “Should 16 and 17-year-olds Vote?” civic engagement question led us to design “Elect Rodgers-Leaper,” a local election and media literacy digital choice board as a way for students to build on and extend their learning about voting and elections (Figure 1). A digital choice board is a graphic organizer that creates a more democratic learning experience by encouraging students to choose what and how they learn (Trust & Maloy, 2020). The “Elect Rodgers-Leaper” digital choice board invites students, individually or in small learning groups, to design a political campaign to elect a candidate to a local political office. As an extension of the civic engagement question about voting, this election digital choice board focuses students’ attention on how politicians and political groups use different media

strategies to motivate people to vote for them in an election.

**Figure 1.**

*Election Digital Choice Board*

<p><b>Website</b> Design the homepage for the candidate's online site.</p> 	<p><b>Twitter</b> Write social media posts urging votes for the candidate.</p> 	<p><b>Campaign Button</b> Create a button or pin with images &amp; text.</p> 	<p><b>Short-Form Videos</b> Record short-form videos showing the candidate in the community.</p> 
<p><b>TikTok or Facebook</b> Record a 30 to 45 second video advertisement for the candidate.</p> 	<p><b>Elect Rodgers-Leaper</b> <b>Civic Engagement Media Literacy</b> <b>Choice Board</b></p>  <p>There are over <a href="#">500,000 people elected to local government positions</a> in the United States.</p> <p><b>How Would You Design a Candidate &amp; Conduct a Campaign to Elect One of Them?</b></p>	<p><b>Instagram Bio</b> Write an Instagram story showing the candidate as favorably as possible.</p> 	
<p><b>Campaign Song</b> Compose lyrics and melody for a song to elect the candidate.</p> 		<p><b>Write-in Voting</b> Explain how to write-in the candidate on the ballot.</p> 	<p><b>Political Fundraising</b> Use social media to get money donations for the campaign.</p> 

Although a shift in the school's academic schedule limited the time the teacher had for the voting unit and was unable to pilot the "Elect Rodgers-Leaper" board, teachers might develop their own choice boards about relevant to students civic engagement activities to ignite thinking and expand civic learning.

#### **4. Engage students in higher-order thinking and civic action projects.**

Higher-order thinking means that students are actively analyzing, evaluating, and creating what they are learning – the skills that sit atop Bloom's Taxonomy, which is the classic hierarchy of thinking skills first proposed by psychologist Benjamin Bloom in the 1950s (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Giving students opportunities to think critically and act civically on the engagement questions they are researching and investigating becomes an essential part of classroom learning activities. For example, teachers could use the engagement questions "Who Should Decide How and When to Regulate Self-Driving Cars and Trucks?" or "Should States Expand Lotteries to Raise Money for Communities?" to have students practice higher order thinking and critical analysis of state and federal powers. Students might investigate what are the regulations about self-driving cars in your state or document how the money is spent that people pay to play lotteries.

Civic engagement questions that activate higher-order thinking can also spark civic action. For example, in response to the engagement question: "How Can School Classrooms Become More Democratic Spaces?" students could conduct a poll among family members, peers, and community people about their earliest memories of participating in a democratic setting where they felt their voice and participation made a difference to what was happening. Based on their findings, they could create a proposal to make their classroom or school a more

democratic space. Students might suggest ways they could engage with teachers in collaboratively shaping daily learning experiences, including what curriculum topics to explore and what instructional methods to include during in-class and online activities. Alternatively, they could propose changes regarding how school rules and codes of conduct are designed, and what role students could play in shaping these. In each of these examples, students are creating, constructing, designing, and writing about issues that matter to them while building a framework of knowledge for future schoolwork and outside of school lives.

### **5. Encourage students to uncover diverse histories and untold stories.**

Civic engagement questions can be designed to invite students to learn the histories of diverse Americans and roles of young people in struggles for civil rights and social justice in this country and draw connections to current contexts. For example, the ENGAGE question: "Should Fred Korematsu and Other Individuals Who Fought for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Have a National Day of Recognition?" presents students with an opportunity to research the histories of diverse individuals and groups who worked to promote change through civic action and community engagement, and investigate whether our society today remembers them or does not know about their efforts. Students could be invited to learn about the roles of young Black Americans who shaped civil rights through transportation protests, including Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Jennings, Ida B. Wells, Jackie Robinson, and Claudette Colvin, among others (Maloy, Edwards, & Shea, 2023). Each of these individuals was at or near the age of today's secondary school students. The "who should have a day of recognition?" civic engagement question serves to open learning about how young people worked for change not only in civil rights, but in many other areas as well including women's rights, disability rights,



worker rights, LGBTQIA rights, and environmental justice.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of civics education in K-12 schools is preparing students to be active and engaged members of school, local, state, national, and global communities. Civic learning; however, does not come from just reading textbooks and remembering facts about the branches of the government. Students must learn about civics by doing civics. To do civics, students need to become interested in and engaged by meaningful and relevant-to-them educational, social, and public policy issues where they believe their views and actions will matter.

In this article, we have described an approach to promote civic engagement by encouraging students to discuss, research, debate, and formulate opinions and perspectives as they build the skills and mindsets of civically-minded members of the democratic communities. Meaningful civic engagement questions in the history, social studies, and civics classroom are those that draw students' attention to decisions that need to be made by students and their communities. By exploring focused civic engagement questions, students can build a foundation for continuous learning about public and educational policy issues, and on that foundation the future of a healthy and vibrant democracy surely rests.

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*The Iowa Council for the Social Studies is an affiliate of the National Council of for the Social Studies Vol 31 Issue 2 (Summer 2023)*

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**Maintaining Rigor in the Post-Pandemic Classroom**  
**(With some help from Taylor Swift)**

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**Abstract:** Confronting learning loss and the psychological effects of the pandemic is still a major challenge. We need to learn the right lessons from this experience. We are correct that students need more emotional support, but we are wrong to think that students need less rigorous work. The results of my 9<sup>th</sup> grade AP Seminar class help illustrate this point.

**Key words:** rigor, lenses, Revolution, social and emotional learning, pandemic

*The Iowa Council for the Social Studies is an affiliate of the National Council of for the Social Studies  
Iowa Journal for the Social Studies Vol 31 Issue 2 (Summer 2023)*

### **Maintaining Rigor in the Post-Pandemic Classroom**

Compassion and rigor are two sides of the same coin.

This is the lesson that I learned, or perhaps re-learned, while teaching a new Advanced Placement® Seminar class to primarily 9th graders during the 2021-2022 school year at Taunton High School in Taunton, Massachusetts. Despite well-documented learning loss and falling test scores across the nation, especially in high poverty areas like ours (Kuhfeld et al., 2022), our students outperformed the state and global averages for this course. Reflecting upon that first year of post-pandemic teaching, I discovered that, at least for some students, raising academic standards was not only possible, but was socially and emotionally appropriate.

The masks we still wore for most of the 2021-2022 seemed to cover up more than our faces. Major social and educational problems were hidden and ready to reveal themselves when we fully opened schools to all students. In our school and in many others, this partial anonymity seemed to embolden students all over the country to tear out toilets in response to social media challenges while others used the masks to hide from reality. When they were not destroying bathrooms, students often congregated there, perhaps dodging the otherwise ubiquitous cameras. Whether newly aggressive or newly inhibited, it was clear that the pandemic fundamentally transformed our society and that school would not be the same.

As a school, we also had ambitious academic goals to increase our rigor. In this respect we followed the assumptions made by the state of Massachusetts, which issued an “Acceleration Roadmap,” to help schools plan to overcome learning loss and handle the psychological impact of COVID-19. The roadmap encouraged, among a host of recommendations, three main principles: fostering a strong sense of community, close monitoring of student academic work, and grade level instruction (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,



2023). I have long believed in all three of those principles, although in our case we were giving students *above* grade level work. The challenge would have been daunting had there been no pandemic, since two-thirds of my students were 9th graders. As students reach adolescence, teaching social and emotional skills becomes more challenging (Yeager, 2017). The vast majority of my students identified as female, the group most heavily psychologically scarred by social isolation (Castellano-Tejedor et al., 2022). Everything was new, for everybody, nearly every day.

I did have a roadmap of my own to follow for AP Seminar in the form of the AP® course structure and description, which I later realized was highly pro-social. AP® Seminar teaches students the fundamentals of research, argumentation, and academic discourse. Those academic values also encouraged social growth through the autonomy it granted students and the achievement of writing and presenting college level research papers (College Board, n.d. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-seminar>). By the end of the course I noticed considerable gains in student confidence, courage, and esteem. Perhaps more importantly, the course required students to collaborate on one of their two required presentations. Collaboration is a skill that had atrophied while we were home in our pajamas.

### **The Pajama Lesson**

It turned out, though, that I had learned something from being home in my pajamas with my two teenage daughters, one of whom was the same age as my students. I saw every day how isolation impacted even well-adjusted teenagers. During the pandemic we rode bikes together, I took long walks by myself, and my wife learned how to make sourdough bread. We dealt with it, but our life was on hold. What we were not doing was working with other people or going to school with other people. This is not just potentially boring, it is an affront to our nature. In *The*

*Human Condition* (1998), Hannah Arendt said it well. “The activity of labor does not need the presence of others, though a being laboring in complete solitude would not be human but an *animal laborans* in the world's most literal significance” (p. 22).

Working in isolation, even on Zoom, is dehumanizing. Bike rides and sourdough were not enough, we need to work productively with each other. It is our very essence. Nietzsche said, in *Twilight of the Idols*, “*From the military school of life*. —That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.” (p. 2). Then again, Nietzsche did not have to endure Zoom school.

The lesson we learned in our pajamas is what I’d call the parental golden rule. Treat students as you want other teachers to treat your own children. I gave my students a safe place to be because they were still emerging from COVID cocoons and that is what all parents want for their children. The golden rule also teaches not to coddle students, no parent wants that. As teachers, we are prone to making a category mistake: we conflate the emotional and the academic. If a student is sad, they need social and emotional support, not necessarily easier work. In fact, research suggests that challenging work is pro-social (Allen et al., 2013). At the same time, a really good way for students to feel better about themselves is to do something hard, and the research seems to bear this out (Yeager, 2016). For students traumatized by a pandemic, thinking about how to find evidence-based solutions to a social problem is an excellent way to stop thinking about yourself. It is also a good way to contextualize your own experience. It is an empowering way to re-emerge into the world, moving from our pajamas to business attire for presentations.

### **Starting from Perspectives**

The Advanced Placement Seminar® class allows teachers to build their course around a theme. I chose Revolutions, and we made the Iranian Revolution a particular emphasis for the

first unit. For historical context and to introduce the topic, I assigned students Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* for summer reading. I hoped that the novel, written from the perspective of a teenager, would make the events of the 1979 Iranian Revolution relatable. I also had them use our library databases to find relevant articles on the topic.

In history classes, I usually move quickly into a chronological account of the events I am teaching. This course was different. In this first unit, I wanted students to learn research skills to prepare for the AP® research papers that they would write, but I also wanted to introduce them to multiple perspectives and disciplinary lenses. Before exploring the causes of the Iranian Revolution, we discussed revolutions in art, sports, history, music, science, and, of course, public health. I then introduced the lenses associated with the AP® course, which include political, philosophical, ethical, and even futuristic. They would later employ these lenses in their group presentations, but at this point in the course that was not the main concern.

As a person who has dabbled in more than one academic discipline, I found these conversations exhilarating. They were also effective. Students quickly began to see multiple perspectives in *Persepolis*, and not just the perspective of the teen author, but also her Marxist uncle, and the conservative mullahs. My ninth grade students had the opportunity, through the “roadmap” of Seminar, to learn overtly what I and many others had to infer from hours in classes and reading academic texts.

### **Defining a Revolution**

Once students understood the perspectives, we moved to theory. I started with Plato's *Crito*, because I wanted students to see how Socrates would drill down to try to discover the essential features of a given concept. In this dialogue the famous philosopher Socrates, convicted by an Athenian democracy for corrupting the youth, discusses the difference between truth and

opinion and the wisdom of the few versus that of the many. The broad themes tracked nicely with those of *Persepolis*. Furthermore, Socrates showed our class that thinking itself could be revolutionary. Yet in his actions Socrates is a loyal citizen who refuses to escape his sentence of death out of his fealty to the laws of Athenian society. Socrates, in his dialogues, insists on clear and consistent definitions for words such as piety or justice, and this helped students see how a term like “Revolution” could be more complicated than it first appears. A major element of our first academic work would include student attempts to define the concept of Revolution.

To further this end, we then jumped from the Classical Age to the Information Age, via Wikipedia. I instructed students to go to the Wikipedia page on Revolutions, and then to choose and research a revolutionary theorist using more traditional and credible sources. The results were interesting. Some of the theorists, such as Crane Brinton or Karl Marx, were well known while others were more obscure. The thinkers we examined were from many historical epochs and from diverse political spectrums. This broadened our interpretive palette.

We strengthened our theoretical understanding of Revolutions from reading chapters from Jack Goldstone’s *Revolutions: A Very Short History*. Here is an example of how one student used Goldstone’s work in her paper.

Furthermore, the way the Shah handled and reacted to the westernization backlash without siding with the Iranians furthered the situation. The Shah was not supporting the people, he was forcing foreign culture on the people of Iran. “In some countries modernizing changes strengthened rulers and created more powerful authoritarian regimes,” Goldstone said (2). When your own leader doesn’t side with the beliefs, customs, values, and culture of his own country, anger and issues are prone to escalate within the population. In addition, Arjomand states... (Nichols, 2021, p.4)

The second citation from this paper was from one of the most challenging texts we read, *The Causes and Significance of the Iranian Revolution*, by Said Amir Arjomand. The quote the student used was, “There can be no doubt that the collapse of the man preceded the collapse of the machine. Once the Shah had lost the will to fight, the state crumbled from within and out of its own lack of momentum (p. 5).” So, using scholarly sources, this student was able to cogently analyze the roles of westernization and modernization in the rise and fall of the Shah. She matched specific events in Iran to general claims about revolutionary theory, then extended her analysis with a relevant citation from a second source.

### **Creating the Right Climate**

After our first unit we began practicing for, then working on two research papers that students submitted to the College Board for grading. We still worked daily on nuances of writing and research, but much of our foundational work was done. When students took up their individual research projects, I worked on maintaining a coherent and inviting classroom climate. We underestimate our students' ability to work through academic problems. We also underestimate how much students need to connect with each other and with their teacher, though the research in this area is strong (Gregory et al., 2013).

Remembering the challenges my own daughters faced, I leaned into team building activities. I brought them bagels in the morning after they accomplished a special task. To work on “line of reasoning” on Halloween we told ghost stories by groups, with each group member adding one line at a time. Their stories were hilarious. One story ended up with me trapped inside *Das Kapital*. Another had us all on some kind of spaceship together as if we were on *The Magic School Bus*. It is easy to forget how high school students have one foot in adulthood and the other planted firmly into childhood.

We listened to music every day. It started with the *Hamilton* soundtrack, and we experimented a bit, but Taylor Swift is an artist that I now know “All Too Well”. It is oddly touching to hear students from disparate backgrounds belting out the same pop tunes about longing and loss and teen angst. It was nice to know we could sing together again. We needed this. If students feel anxious just being near each other, how could they think together? Music helps. When your whole class starts randomly dancing a jig to “Cotton-Eyed Joe” they are probably more likely to collaborate academically.

It surely was not all fun and games. There were disagreements and complaints from group members, there were tears from students who “couldn’t do” the presentation – before they did it. There were tedious annotated bibliographies and research paper rabbit holes. And there were those pesky citations. The College Board® did a nice job of pacing and designing this course to give students the opportunity to grow.

And they took it. When our scores came back in July, 87 percent of my 32 students had passed with a 3 or higher and several scored 5s, the highest available score.

### **Reflections**

I have described here some of the strategies I developed in teaching a new course. I have taken a descriptive approach that applies what Donald Schon might describe as reflection-in-action (Munby, 1989). I had a mostly intuitive and experiential approach to teaching this course. Upon reflection, however, I think we gained from taking the role of experts and theories seriously. When I walked around the room coaching students, I would not simply accept that they had research or information, but I pressed them to find the most prominent experts in their area. One student, on a whim early in our course, emailed the scholar Woody Holton, an expert in the American Revolution, and was very pleased to receive a prompt reply. Setting the

academic background for research helped students solve the domain specificity problem for critical thinking (Willingham, 2007).

I also tried to treat them with what Carl Rogers called Unconditional Positive Regard. If a student missed a deadline, I inquired what happened, offered any assistance I could, and left out the usual side-eye and scolding. When students didn't finish their reading in Greek philosophy, I just plowed on the way my college professors did. I was not going to lower my standards. Soon nearly every student did nearly every assignment and they all completed the major research papers on time. They all did their presentations on time.

I believe that the pre-work we did on theories and perspectives set a high bar for students that helped lead to their success. That work was very much deliberate. However, much of what I taught students was in an immediate recognition of a need. Suddenly I would realize that I should tell students about the significance of abstracts in research papers or how to do better key terms searches. I think this seemingly arbitrary approach was effective because it ensured as little teacher talk as possible. Students asked hundreds of questions, and most of the time my response was to remind them where they could find the resources to answer the question themselves.

What worked for my AP® Seminar class obviously might not have worked the same way with less motivated students. Yet the principles of maintaining high academic standards while ramping up compassion is the way to, as Taylor herself might say, “shake off” the impact of the pandemic. What we must never shake off, however, is the rigor our students deserve.

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**BOOK REVIEW: *On critical race theory:***

***Why it matters & why you should care.***

Ray, V. E. (2022). *On critical race theory: Why it matters & why you should care.*

Random House.

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**Abstract:** Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not some ominous conspiracy theory that ‘woke,’ leftist ideologues teach this nation’s children to turn them against the country. Rather, it is a tool to unmask the purported race neutrality in a society that is far from post-racial. Victor Ray succinctly explains the tenets of CRT and uses relatable examples to illustrate the effects of interest convergence, whiteness as property, colorblindness, intersectionality, racialized organizations, and identity politics. This book benefits educators in understanding the societal inequities their students of color face daily, in and outside of schools.

**On Critical Race Theory: Why it Matters & Why You Should Care**

“Many of the ideas attributed to critical race theory are in fact just plain honesty about Americas long-standing structural racism.” (Ray, 2022, p. xxiv)

In education broadly, and in state policy ‘debates’ specifically, little excites as much as Critical Race Theory (CRT) at this political moment—feelings run high over what should be taught in U.S. History and social studies at large, which books may be read as a whole class, and which ones can be made available to students in libraries. On the right, CRT is invoked and calls for “anti-woke” policies are heard. What is not usually part of these calls is exploring the nature of CRT: what even is this ominous, ostensibly brain-eating amoeba that is ‘coming for’ our students?! Enter Victor Ray and his “clear-eyed, expert field guide” (McMillan Cottom, 2022) to CRT.

In this short, highly readable chapter book, Ray succinctly explains what CRT is—and what it isn’t. This book helps educators see the backdrop facing students in their day-to-day. The scholarship and many illustrative examples Ray provides avoid technical jargon without losing academic edge. Every chapter elaborates on a tenet of CRT and shows that individualized recourse to meritocracy and progress cannot explain the persistent systemic racial inequality this nation has produced. Pairing academic research with stories highlights the United States’ profound racial inequality. Ray links many of the anti-CRT, “anti-woke” rallying cries to the prevailing ignorance of the country’s racial history. Deliberate ignorance is the primary weapon of those seeking to maintain their ‘interpretation’ of racial reality: laws targeting the teaching of CRT—such as Iowa’s House File 802 (2021)—are “trying to legally mandate racial ignorance”

(p. xxvi). Ray seeks to make visible causes of this avoidance and of the persistent racial inequality we still have today.

Anti-CRT campaigns are yet another iteration in the recurring backlash to successful attempts at reducing racial inequity: Reconstruction was followed by a southern Redemption (Williams, 2023); school desegregation after *Brown v. Board* has been escalated into extreme ‘voluntary’ segregation due to residential zoning, white flight, and funding issues (see e.g., Kozol, 2006, 2012; Rothstein, 2017; Semuels, 2015); and inroads into curricular inclusion of anything other than the white supremacist progress narrative are being attacked through laws and a renewed push for private schooling (e.g., Iowa HF802, 2021; Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping, 2020; Pierce, 2021; Turner et al., 2017). Ray demonstrates that such backlash is not a series of independent individual or local choices, but highly concerted action. He was compelled to write this book because “people are trying to erase and turn back the relatively minor inroads critical race theorists have made in getting these stories told” (p. xi.)—educators need to be aware of this to recognize and counteract it in their classrooms.

CRT scholars, many of whom are sociologists and legal scholars, meticulously research sustained inequality and document its structures and outcomes—over and over again. Scientifically, it is not in doubt that systemic inequities exist. CRT provides “language to describe and understand the sometimes-hidden processes of discrimination, exclusion, and structural racism that shape the social world” (p. xiv). Ray’s storytelling makes palatable and relatable what could otherwise be an academic treatise full of jargon. That does not mean, of course, that *On CRT* dumbs down the complex elements and how they overlap—on the contrary. Ray is a public scholar who does not compromise rigor for accessibility: he simply does both!

*On CRT* breaks down the tenets of critical race theory: it shows their origins and illustrates how they are at work today. Findings from sociological, historical, and legal scholarship provide empirical evidence of the patterns illustrated by the anecdotal stories of individuals' lived realities. Readers are introduced to the main voices in the, by now, necessarily interdisciplinary field: for CRT at large, that includes W. E. B. DuBois, Derrick Bell, and Kimberlé Crenshaw; for individual tenets of CRT, many other scholars, intellectuals, and activists lead the charge—for example, Cheryl Harris, Martin Luther King, Jr., Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Ida B. Wells, Malcolm X, and Charles Mills. The book's short, informative chapters allow readers to target specific buzz words like colorblindness, whiteness as property, intersectionality, identity politics, and interest convergence.

Chapter 1 debunks race as a biological category. Race relies upon, and reinforces, a set of ideas about the relationship between physical characteristics, geographic origins, and the relative worth of human bodies. It is a social construction, yes. But that does not mean it is imaginary. Since people believe in it, it has social, political, and economic currency—with very real, very inequitable outcomes in access to resources and quality of life. Ray points out how flexible, contextual, and malleable the concept of race is in continuing oppression to preserve the supremacy of whiteness under changing circumstances: for example, when it was no longer permissible to openly enslave people based on their race, convict leasing (supported by racialized law enforcement) gained traction.

The understanding that racism is common, routine, and ordinary is under investigation in chapter 2: Ray demonstrates that “structural racism is a distributional system that combines ideas about race with unequal access to social and material resources” (p. 20). When discrimination against non-whites is built so deeply into the system that it is seen as legitimate, commonsense,

or ‘just the way things are,’ it is, in effect, rendered invisible. These structures pertain to education in many ways: (1) they promote residential segregation, which directly links to school funding via property taxes; (2) they impact on school ‘discipline’ in that Black students are punished more often and more harshly; (3) high-stakes assessments favor learners from white middle-class backgrounds in the phrasing of questions, scenarios offered, and responses accepted; (4) Black children are more likely to be tracked into noncollege pathways which leads to in-building segregation of ostensibly integrated schools; and (5) labor market discrimination disadvantages Black-sounding applicants with high qualifications (cf. Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Educators who do not recognize and challenge at least (2)-(4) will reinforce structural racism by simply ‘doing their job.’

The neutral language of colorblindness is challenged in chapter 3. A phrase like “I’m not a racist, but...” is an indicator of such alleged non-racism—whatever follows expresses racist sentiments. Politically and socially, the covert racism of Nixon’s “war on drugs” (1971) disrupted Black communities by targeting the possession of marijuana and heroin. Colorblind over-policing of ostensible ‘security’ measures along with harsh sentencing continues today (Alexander, 2010). In political discourse, a thought-terminating feat of colorblind language allows its users to accuse their political opponents of bringing race into an otherwise race-neutral situation: in racist zero-sum logic, a dog whistle<sup>1</sup> like “MAGA” promises whites the recovery of perceived losses without saying anything about race. “Law and order” and “tough on crime” are other infamous dog whistles for policing low-income communities, particularly young Black and Latino men. Publicly, they generally do not get flagged and decried as racist. Such evasive

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<sup>1</sup> A dog whistle is a facially neutral term that signals discriminatory intent to like-minded insiders while appearing racially innocent on the surface.

language offers alibis, it obscures motives, dodges responsibility, and muddies the waters of what is permissible versus what is considered racist (cf., Bonilla-Silva, 2022).

Chapter 4 challenges the notion of perpetual racial progress and debunks the myth that, in this country, everything is inevitably getting better for everybody—if they just have enough talent to seize the abundant opportunities they are presented with. Legal gains through civil rights legislation and Supreme Court rulings are often seen as permanent. Any residual inequality must surely be due to either lack of talent or another’s individual bigotry, not institutional discrimination. Ray walks the reader through the historically recurring theme of hard-fought legal gains and economic progress for Black Americans and the seemingly inevitable backlash as racial patterns adapt to maintain white dominance (Bell, 1992). Sometimes, this is done through the law (e.g., voter ID requirements) or innocuous infrastructure ‘improvements’ like running a highway straight through a thriving Black neighborhood; at other times, violence is directed against successful Black communities (e.g., the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921) to destroy wealth and change residential patterns of Black families. White resistance to Black progress generally stems from zero-sum thinking that prompts fear of losing out: if African Americans are improving their station, that must mean whites’ quality of living will be declining. Rhetorically, not accepting American exceptionalism and the belief in its ability of ever self-correcting its residual flaws is used to make social justice activists seem ungrateful. Their causes are dubbed illegitimate and insolent for not recognizing the benevolence and essential goodness of the American project—Black Lives Matter faces such tropes.

Derrick Bell’s recognition and explanation of interest convergence comprises chapter 5. Legal reductions of discrimination do not come out of the goodness of white supremacists’ hearts or a moral awakening to the injustices that the ‘old’ system perpetuates. Bell attributes gains

made by African Americans during the Cold War to lawmakers not wanting to face accusations of hypocrisy: rather than facing international ridicule for how Black Americans were being treated in their own, oh-so freedom- and equality-loving country, white lawmakers approved desegregation to end the most egregious expressions of Jim Crow (e.g., school segregation in *Brown v. Board* 1954). Going further, scholars assert that whites may well vote against their own self-interest where racial resentment outweighs interest convergence: Some would not have universal health care or public swimming pools (cf. McGhee, 2022) on the grounds that it would subsidize underserving minorities—even as the beneficiaries would be majority white.

Coined by Cheryl Harris, whiteness as property is explained in chapter 6. Whiteness confers differential access to resources like land, physical property (e.g., favorable mortgages to purchase houses in ‘nice’ neighborhoods), education (e.g., who could fully utilize the GI Bill), and jobs that helped build generational wealth and ‘merit.’ To tap into some of this capital of whiteness, light-skinned African Americans may pass as white—that is, pretend to be white—but it is psychologically taxing to do so over sustained periods of time. Equally exhausting is not hearing your own stories told and recognized as legitimate. The importance of counternarratives in illustrating larger patterns of inequity is shown in chapter 7. Targets of racism may express their experiences in personal stories, narratives, or parables to affirm that their perspectives matter and to challenge dominant stories of progress and meritocracy. White narratives are not more important than the messages of those with less social, economic, or political capital.

Ray’s own contribution to CRT is a theory of racialized organizations (2019), which is explained in chapter 8. Organizations like schools, workplaces, churches, or health care providers shape racial meanings, provide context for discrimination (or acceptance), and shape social mobility. In such collective organizations, society makes, consolidates, accumulates, and



distributes its resources—it spreads and legitimizes structural racism through biased organizational procedures like algorithms and hiring practices. Teachers should take note of the racialized mechanisms at play in their own schools. One of the most readily relatable elements of CRT is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995)—probably anybody other than white, cisgender, Protestant males has noticed that one or more of their identities are lower in the semi-hidden social hierarchies. Sex, race/ethnicity, gender, linguistic standardization, socioeconomics, or immigration status all impact how we view ourselves and each other. How we are being viewed by others often comes with prejudice and judgment based on one or more identities. Especially Black feminists highlight that we mustn't look at race or gender through single-issue analysis, but rather appreciate the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

The final chapter briefly illustrates identity politics, which can operate in the open or through very subversive channels. CRT scholars have documented a closing of ranks among right-wing whites that encompasses lobbying for continued exclusivity: the rallying cry of “reverse racism” can be heard. In making their particular political agendas seem universal, those with the most power and capital can make the needs of people of color appear like ‘special interests’—and thus not worthy of receiving communal resources. Affluent Americans who adhere to white identity politics tend to see their success in terms of hard work, effort, and deservingness; not as the result of structural advantages that have little to do with their own personal merit. Hiding these feelings in norms and innocence, in what is seen as normal vs. special, and denying that whites engage in identity politics are all forms of identity politics. Liberals apply them to justify discriminatory policies under the guise of free-market economic interests—and receive material and psychological benefits.

The most vocal opponents of CRT claim that it “tear[s] apart the national fabric” (Silverman, 2021). If that is the case, then (a) racism must be part of that fabric already, and (b) this nation must not be a very strong construct to begin with. Otherwise, how could pulling at the thread of racism unravel the whole nation? Throughout, Ray uses *On CRT* to unmask the ostensibly race-neutral language that is used in politics and social discourse to cover for racist intentions and outcomes. CRT challenges white innocence by calling out the warped morality of structural participation in the dehumanization of nonwhites. It is an intellectual bulwark against the propaganda of history and offers a multiracial democracy tools to question white dominance more. CRT illustrates and explains patterns of lived experiences among nonwhites. Educators should seek to understand discriminatory forces at play and how they impact on their students—not to unravel the foundations this country is allegedly built on; but to honor the nation by expanding access to them! This book is not for everyone, but it is definitely for teachers who wish to teach honest social studies, who are “interested in creating an antiracist, just future” together with their students (p. xvii).

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**Book review:**  
**Making classroom discussions work: Methods for Quality Dialogue  
in the Social Studies**

Lo, J. C. (2022). *Making Classroom Discussions Work: Methods for Quality Dialogue in the Social Studies*. Research and Practice in Social Studies Series. Teachers College Press.

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**Abstract:** Discussion is at the core of a democracy. Students in a social studies classroom need to learn the skill of discussion and participate in discussions as equitable citizens. Jane C. Lo's (2022) *Making classroom discussions work* offers educators practical strategies that establish quality discussions in classrooms. This book review analyzes the extent to which the articles in the edited volume engage the themes of equity. Most of the chapters either explicitly or implicitly address equity in discussion participation, format, and question-design, but establishing equity as a central theme throughout all chapters could better serve the needs of the students from subjugated communities.

## **Book Review: Making Classroom Discussions Work**

### **Introduction**

Noting that quality discussions are needed in social studies classrooms and are essential to democratic engagement, Jane C. Lo's (2022) *Making classroom discussions work* is an edited volume that aims to help social studies teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators build such discussions. The objective of the edited volume is clear – It aims to explain the reasons for conducting discussions in social studies education and illustrate the best pedagogies for conducting equitable discussions. The authors of the edited volume all ground their work in theories and in practice. For social studies educators, this edited volume complements existing literatures on social studies pedagogies by focusing exclusively on engaging students in classroom discussions. In “Foreword,” Hess (2022) defines quality discussions as “content-specific, educative group conversations” that include multiple perspectives, opportunities for self-reflection, and collective construction of knowledge (p. viii). Aligned with the definition of a quality discussion, the edited volume is divided into three parts, each with a distinct but interconnected theme related to building class discussions.

Part I focuses on the basic pedagogy of discussion facilitation in social studies classrooms. The chapters in Part I establish the foundational understanding that a reader needs to have to facilitate a quality discussion. Chapter 1 establishes guiding principles that speak to the core values of quality discussions. These principles emphasize cooperative learning, critical thinking, and students' self-assessment. Educators can use these principles as criteria to implement new discussion strategies, modify their existing pedagogies, and provide constructive feedback to their colleagues' teaching practices.

Part II focuses on the different discussion strategies. The strategies introduced in Part II are grounded in specific scenarios with clear-to-follow protocols. The authors of Part II chapters are candid in their reflections of their pedagogical moves. For teachers, Part II guides them in the planning and the implementation of a classroom discussion. Preservice teachers will find Part II especially helpful because it addresses the challenges that they are likely to encounter in their facilitation of discussions.

Part III emphasizes on equity in discussions. Lo (2022) argued that equity matters not only because discussions need to be “equitably distributed and facilitated” but also because equitable discussions are aligned with the goal of establishing a just and equitable society in civic education (Lo, 2022, p. 5). For every justice-oriented educator, equity should be one of the guiding principles in their pedagogy. The dedication of four chapters on the theme of equity can prepare preservice social studies teachers to serve the needs of their diverse students. It can also offer a useful lens for experienced teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching practices.

Even though equity is not explicitly mentioned in Hess’ definition of quality discussions, Lo (2022) suggested that “[conducting] equitable productive discussions” is one of the goals of the edited volume (p. 6). The theme of equity makes this edited volume stand out among other prominent teacher-facing social studies pedagogies books which primarily focus on literacy skills and historical thinking skills (Wineburg et al., 2013; Monte-Sano et al., 2014; Larson & Keiper, 2011). Therefore, this book review will focus on the role of equity in the edited volume’s articulation of quality discussions.

### **Strengths**

Equitable participation is explicitly and thoroughly addressed in Part III. In their argument on the participation of students of color in critical civic inquiry, Mirra & Garcia (2022)

ask an important question – “Within a systemically inequitable society along the lines of race, class, gender, and other social constructs, can we ever deliberate as equals?” (pp. 192-193). Their emphasis on equitable participation is crucial, especially when critical civic inquiry is about deliberation on issues such as race, gender, and wealth inequality. Students with different racial, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds may participate in the discussions of those issues differently. Their argument also sheds light on the enduring struggle to balance between inclusivity and authenticity of deliberation in classrooms (Hess & McAvoy, 2014). To balance the two, Mirra & Garcia recommend teachers to prepare their students to learn from others, which involves decentering their own experiences and practicing active listening of others’ experiences. In doing so, teachers can establish a classroom environment that values individual and group experiences which may otherwise be neglected in society. Through drawing an explicit connection to the obstacles to equitable participation, Mirra & Garcia offer a pedagogical recommendation that invites all students’ participation in imagining a better future. Their recommendation aligns with Parker’s (2006) three strategies of humility, caution, and reciprocity in approximating “domination-free” classroom discussion (p. 16). When students decenter their own experiences, they humbly accept that their experiences are not the whole truth and are cautious in not denying others’ experiences, which collectively establishes a reciprocal classroom environment.

Equitable participation requires equitable discussion formats and protocols, and the methods of constructing equitable discussion formats and protocols are featured prominently throughout the edited volume. The first guiding principle in Larson’s principles for class discussions is cooperative learning. Larson argues that small group sizes, heterogenous grouping, and the emphasis on “safe space” are all important in cooperative learning. In Parker’s (2022)



discussion on structured academic controversy, he elaborates on the specific elements in cooperative learning, which include positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, and teacher-assigned heterogeneous learning groups (p. 74). Parker's definition of heterogeneous grouping encompasses a wide range of social identities and learning needs. Through such arrangement, a teacher can help student navigate multiple perspectives and prepare them for democratic engagement, but the teacher also needs to be aware that heterogeneous grouping can also create power dynamics that hinder equitable participation. The format of heterogeneous grouping needs clear and rigid structures for students to follow. A teacher who is interested in incorporating heterogeneous grouping in an equitable discussion should also read the discussion setup outlined by McAvoy & Lowery (2022) in chapter 6, the structure for students' self-reflection in Mirra & Garcia's (2022) article in chapter 12, the "read-inquire-write" model by Rebull et al. (2022) in chapter 8, and the online discussion norms mentioned in Hodgin's (2022) article in chapter 9. Together, these chapters provide specific guidance for laying the structural groundwork for an equitable discussion.

The opportunity to conduct discussions online offers an alternative path to equitable discussions. Using the Internet as a force for equity is featured in multiple chapters. The Internet can break down many traditional barriers to knowledge and offer deliberation platforms that render certain social identities invisible and irrelevant. It is essential in closing the "democracy divide," which requires providing high-quality democratic education to a wider range of students (Hess, 2009). Mirra & Garcia (2022) believe that Digital Democratic Dialogue brings authentic and productive discussions across geographical and social boundaries. In their case studies, students from different U.S. states engaged in dialogues and storytellings with each other, and the participants found commonalities and envisioned future with their distant peers. Such

dialogues challenge the conventional source of information and place individual experiences at the center stage.

Hodgin's (2022) discussion on online civic and political dialogues also highlights how to use the Internet towards the goal of equity. Aiming to guide students' online civic learning towards online civic actions, Hodgin offers practical guiding questions that a teacher could use when designing their lessons on online discussions. Both Hodgin and Mirra & Garcia envision the use of the Internet as a powerful tool to challenge a monolithic understanding of the world. The Internet allows greater exposure to different stories and perspectives. With their teachers' support, students from subjugated communities can amplify their voices by using the Internet. Online discussions can also nurture civic participation among the youth whose communities have been historically silenced and oppressed.

Even though not addressed directly in the chapters, online discussions can have positive implications for global education as well. Through the Internet, students can dialogue with youth from across the world, especially with those from non-Western societies. Non-western knowledge has long been subjugated by Eurocentrism and its continual dominance in education systems in the West (Dozono, 2020; Marino & Bolgatz, 2010). Hearing non-Western youth's perspectives and experiences can help U.S. students challenge the dominance of Eurocentrism in U.S. curricula, and so it can contribute to a more equitable outlook of the world that incorporates diverse perspectives.

The book's discussion of the Internet extends beyond seeing students as the only participants. In their argument on preparing teachers for discussion facilitation, Kawashima-Ginsberg et al. (2022) suggest that online professional developments and collaborations offer teachers safe spaces in which they could learn through trial and error. They note that online

trainings are particularly useful for rural teachers who may have limited access to professional developments (pp. 38-39). Highlighting the need of rural teachers and teachers who may feel vulnerable in in-person settings reflects the authors' commitment to equity. Teachers' equitable access to discussion strategies is essential in bringing equity to classroom discussions nationwide. However, the book's argument of the Internet's role in equitable discussions could have extended to its application in teaching English language learners. Supporting bilingual and multilingual learners is one of Larson's principles for facilitating class discussions, and the Internet can offer them an equitable access to a discussion that is otherwise harder to achieve in an in-person setting.

### **Weaknesses and Suggestions**

While the chapters in Part III of the edited volume explicitly and thoroughly discuss the role of equity in social studies discussions, the chapters in Part I and II engage with the principle of equity more implicitly and to a lesser extent. When introducing the guiding principles of classroom discussions, Larson (2022) argues that "students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds" should collaborate in a discussion. In terms of assessment, a teacher needs to "differentiate the form and use of discussion assessment" because students' cultures, personalities, and genders may affect their participation (p. 22). Larson also notes that emergent bilingual and multilingual learners may need extra support in their participation. Even though equity is not explicitly mentioned, Larson's principles reflect elements of equity, including considering students' diverse backgrounds and different needs when planning and facilitating a discussion. Additionally, he emphasizes that a discussion is "at its simplest a structured activity in which the process of conversing encourages students to pool ideas and information and

illuminate alternative perspectives” (p. 11), but the role of equity is ambiguous in this definition: What is the role of equity in the pooling of ideas? Should all perspectives be treated equally?

Equity should be one of the guiding principles of classroom discussions. In his articulation of discussion pedagogy in civic education, Parker (2006) writes, “discussions can be sites of knowledge production and will formation; they are not simply discursive containers in which performed knowledge and opinion are exchanged” (p. 13). He further argues that discussions should “[authorize] a greater array of voices” and “[legitimize] subaltern discussions” (p. 15). Through drawing attention to subaltern perspectives, Parker acknowledges the existence of a hierarchy of perspectives and emphasizes on how classroom discussions can change that hierarchy when producing knowledge. Therefore, Parker would suggest that the pooling of ideas and illumination of alternative perspectives must lead to the generation of new knowledge that is equity-oriented. To achieve this goal, students’ participation in a discussion must be equitable.

The authors in Part I and II could have more extensively addressed students’ inequitable participation in discussions. In McAvoy & Lowery’s (2022) comparison of students’ experiences in deliberation and in debate, they argue that the voices of students from subjugated communities are likely to be neglected in the process of reaching a consensus in a class deliberation. Their research also found that girls were more hesitant to speak in both deliberations and debates. In their suggestions to teachers, McAvoy & Lowery write that “teachers ought to pay attention to the dynamics in the room, use strategies that scaffold the development of discussion skills, and be ready to attend to the emotional aspect of discussion” (p. 103). McAvoy & Lowery’s recommendation to teachers could have benefitted from a more explicit connection to equitable participation. For instance, what can a teacher do to ensure the voices of students from

subjugated communities are heard in consensus deliberation? McAvoy & Lowery also point out the necessity to attend to the emotional aspect of a discussion, but what is the role of emotion in classroom discussions?

There is a missed opportunity to make connection between students' emotion and their equitable participation in discussions. Sheppard et al. (2015) argue that the role that emotion plays in social studies education remains an ambiguous topic largely due to social studies' focus on objectivity and neutrality. They write, "Understanding the complexity of the work of teaching and learning about contested histories required acknowledging the centrality of emotions to the process" (p. 151). From Sheppard et al.'s perspective, McAvoy & Lowery could have further expanded on how they conceptualize emotion in discussion. Parker's (2006) strategy of reciprocity in classroom discussions may also be useful. He defines reciprocity as "the stance that ventilates the listener's ego," which requires a listener to acknowledge that a speaker has a better understanding of their own "social position, emotion, beliefs, and interpretations" (p. 16). Here, Parker sees emotion as an essential component in a student's experience in a discussion. Thus, creating equitable participation in a discussion requires a teacher to reject the idea of neutrality and objectivity in social studies (Hess & McAvoy, 2014); it also requires the teacher to consider of how students' different emotions, particularly the emotions of students from subjugated communities, interplay in the discussion.

Part I and II can help its readers develop engaging discussion strategies, but the authors could have incorporated the principle of equity more thoroughly. In his chapter on structural academic controversy, Parker (2022) writes that "teachers must present two sides of the selected controversy" (p. 81). Even though students may gain exposure to multiple perspectives, the power dynamics among the different sides of an argument needs further exploration. One of

Parker's examples, for instance, asks, "Is mass incarceration of African Americans the new Jim Crow?" (p. 75). First, what perspective does a teacher need to introduce to argue that the mass incarceration of African Americans is not the new Jim Crow? Second, if presenting the two perspectives as equals, how would African American students in the classroom feel about participating in the discussion? Writing about different types of issues in discussion, Hess & McAvoy (2014) argue that there is a key difference between an open empirical question and a settled empirical question: The former has an ongoing scholarly debate while the latter has been sufficiently answered. In the context of the aforementioned question, if a teacher chooses to engage their students in debating if the mass incarceration of African Americans is the new Jim Crow, those students would have to seriously consider the argument that institutional racism does not exist. Such pedagogy is not aligned with the principle of equity.

Besides the focused issue of a discussion, the preparation for a discussion also needs to reflect the principle of equity. When preparing students for a structured academic controversy discussion, Parker writes that students would need to "talk about [a text's] "position, facts, and arguments" and "anticipate the arguments the opposing pair will make" (p. 83). Through letting students explore multiple perspectives to a controversy, a teacher can broaden students' knowledge of an issue and build their political tolerance (Hess, 2009). However, what Parker could also have included is students' investigation of the context of a text and the text's power relationship with other texts. For instance, testimonios from immigrant students serve as important counter-narratives that challenge the official narratives of immigration (Rodríguez & Salinas, 2019). When using both testimonios and official narratives in a discussion on immigration, a teacher will need to guide students in contextualizing the two texts and thinking about their power relationship. Doing so can ensure that the discussion reflects the ongoing

political debate regarding immigration policy while also considering the sensitivity of the issue to some students, particularly first-generation immigrant students. With such sensitivity, a teacher can find a balance between authenticity and inclusivity in a truly equitable social studies discussion (Hess & McAvoy, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Since helping educators conduct equitable productive discussions is the main objective of *Making classroom discussions work*, equity should be reflected throughout its chapters. Except for the chapters in Part III, most of the other chapters in Part I and II inadequately address the principle of equity in their articulation of classroom discussions. My primary suggestion is that the principle of equity should be included in the edited volume's definition of a quality discussion, which means a discussion must engage issues that concern equity, have equitable discussion format, and ensure students' equitable participation. Instead of having a separate part for chapters dedicated to the theme of equity, equity should be addressed in all chapters. Nevertheless, *Making classroom discussions work* offers an extensive and practical roadmap to conducting classroom discussions for educators. With the principle of equity in mind, educators can use the edited volume as a guide to design future discussions, reflect upon their existing practices, and offer constructive feedbacks to their colleagues.

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