

Evaluating the story of the United States as told through the United States History and
Government Regents Exam: Omissions, obscurations, and oppressions in a mandatory New York
State high school assessment

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The United States history survey course is a standard high school history class in the state of New York. The academic goal is for students to understand key people and developments that molded the United States into its modern identity as a progressive, democratic nation-state. This research examined one manifestation of this course in New York State, the United States History and Government Regents exam. The United States History and Government Regents exam is a mandatory, standardized assessment usually taken by high school juniors after completing their annual survey U.S. history class. From 2001 to 2020, the exam positioned 50 multiple-choice questions with a chronological permutation of the survey course. I analyzed the exam over a two-decade period with 57 individual exams and 2,850 multiple-choice questions.

The goal of this research was to interrogate an unsuspecting objective history of the United States as conveyed through this exam. Using a combination of critical theories to look for patterns and trends, I considered both hidden content and featured pillars of the survey course through the medium of the Part I multiple-choice. For included content, I asked if questions were phrased in a way that forced conclusions about certain events, such as the internment of thousands of Americans during World War II. I used discourse analysis to better understand the covert intentions of plural pronouns like *we* and *people*. The findings in Chapter 4 revealed that these collective pronouns were used to conceal oppressions against certain groups. The implications section of Chapter 5 deconstructed how the exam was tethered to a master narrative of the United States, and to a linear, progressive history that was unwilling to highlight oppressed voices or recognize unresolved, regressive, antidemocratic choices.

For excluded content, I asked whose perspectives were continually missing. Which features were centered on political maps and which features were absent? Whose stories were

central and whose stories were sacrificed to bolster a narrative about progress? How were advances for some disguised as advances for all, and at whose expense? What critical historical developments were omitted from the 2,850 questions?

The findings are important for multiple reasons. First is that New York State officially committed its public education system to cultural responsiveness in 2019 with the New York State Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education framework. How can curriculum meaningfully evolve in the future if educators do not fully understand the ways it was culturally irresponsible in the past?

Second is that the survey U.S. history course is a powerful transmitter of knowledge about the story of the United States. Are we, as culturally responsive educators in New York, willing to extend the curriculum to include traditionally hidden developments, even if those developments interrogate and compromise the master narrative? Can we diversify the evidence, acknowledge regression, and clarify the specific beneficiaries of progress, thereby creating spaces for students to derive their own interpretations about the story and trajectory of the United States?

These are difficult questions, yet educators can confront them more intentionally if we are willing to grapple with the complexities of the survey United States history course and the interaction between the discipline of history and the goals of nation building.

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Approved by:

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These are difficult questions, yet educators can confront them more intentionally if we are willing to grapple with the complexities of the survey United States history course and the interaction between the discipline of history and the goals of nation building.

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Dedication

To my ancestors - those who have gone before me to sacrifice for the future:

For my grandmother Constance “S”, an MLL student in NYC before the terminology existed.

To my great-grandmother, who I remember as Marietta DelVecchio- she crossed a country and an ocean for a new start.

To my descendants- the ones I have yet to meet and the ones who sacrificed so their mother could complete coursework, write papers, and research curriculum.

You ate ready meals when I could not cook, you patiently waited for my central time zone classes to end here in New York, you made me laugh, you showed interest in my research, you listened to my early ideas. You were supportive through and through.

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Lastly, for all the lost perspectives and the hidden voices, to all the folks who may never be at the center of a history exam question or essay prompt. May we never forget that history is incomplete.

Chapter 1 - Introduction, Problem, and Research Questions

Subjectivities

An educator's background influences how they connect to their students, how they conduct academic research, and the ways in which they execute curriculum in their classrooms. In the book *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, Adams (2016) wrote that "The coordination of personal, individual experience with larger structural and societal reference points shows the continuity of the past into the present" (p. 28). The following is a reflection on my past experiences with family, community, American politics, immigration, and schooling. These experiences situate my positionality as educator and researcher in this paper, and it is important to share because researchers are not neutral. The standard of objective historical researcher is now mostly rejected in favor of naming and situating a researcher's positionality (McCullagh, 2000; Litz, 1997; Eick, 2011).

Personal Connection

I grew up in the New York City borough of Queens in the 1980s; Ronald Reagan was president, my neighborhood had ample parking, and I could see the tops of the Twin Towers from the local park. As children, we would run up the flagpole hill, the red and white stripes would whip around in the breeze as the antenna from the North Tower, about eight miles from where we stood, looked like it was touching the clouds. It was a magical and almost surreal scene. The World Trade Center displayed unprecedented achievements and they were a symbol to a young child that the United States had conquered both nature and technology.

Raised in a working class, devout Catholic household, I remember believing that President Reagan was second to God. I learned from Apple (2019) that the president is considered a "point of contact" (p. 102) between children and legitimacy in a society. He wrote

“...there is a strongly personal initial bond between the child and these representatives of the structure of authority” (Apple, 2019, p. 102). Indeed, one of my earliest political memories is hearing the President and other politicians deliver their speeches from my parents’ black and white television in the kitchen. I never paid much attention to the details. The long run on sentences, sometimes interrupted by applause, seemed inapplicable to my young life. However, I still felt the subliminal messages from the tone and cantor of these speeches: The Soviets were evil, history had ended, and humanity had arrived at the zenith of civilized life, led by the Americans. I was not sure where we had arrived, but the messages were delivered with a wildly confident, mildly arrogant, and rather conclusive tone. It seemed the United States was at the center of the world with most other countries orbiting around them, while a few others were still following the nearly collapsed Soviets. This concept of American exceptionalism inculcated towards the end of the Cold War is shared by older millennials, including Ben Rhodes who also grew up as a grandchild of New York immigrants in the 1980s. Rhodes (2021) wrote about his experiences with early American patriotism in New York City:

I marveled at the idea of crossing an ocean on a boat and then seeing both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty announcing the bigger and better life. All of this was tied up with the Reagan era that shaped my political consciousness, the movie star president whose genial certainty assured me that we were the good guys, and the Commies were the bad guys. That’s what the Statue of Liberty in some essential way represented. This was the story we told ourselves (p. 253).

The history of the United States is a story with protagonists and antagonists, and events that support the designations of who belongs in which category. It is an art to create this story of oppressed colonies turned into a benevolent giant, ever progressing, and learning from past

mistakes. Madeline Albright reflected in her final written work titled *Fascism: A Warning*, "...the story of America's birth- wrapped in the swaddling clothes of Jefferson's pros- has always been powerful enough to overcome internal contradiction" (Albright, 2018, p. 208). Whether it has overcome contradiction is debatable, but it surely has tried to do so via the history of the United States crafted in curriculum materials and delivered to school children. Apple (2019) connected the dots between curriculum and control in society when he wrote that curriculum "is not random" (p. 65) and schools, "act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony" (p. 6). There is a reason that Jefferson's decision to ignore the first black republic in the Western hemisphere, Haiti, is excluded content in a survey United States history course (Danticat, 2004).

My father was of German heritage and his ancestors arrived in the United States sometime before the 20th century, which is possibly why I remember paying close attention to reports on the collapse of the Berlin Wall. As a young child I asked him one day in the late 1980s which "side" of Germany his family was from, certain there must have been some major distinction between East and West. He shrugged his shoulders and barely mumbled an audible answer, which I cannot even recall. But his entire demeanor communicated a more significant message which is that it did not matter, there was no difference, he could not care less, and neither did anyone he knew. I was equal parts stunned and embarrassed over my ignorance that this major division of a once unified Germany, the nation of his family's heritage, was entirely insignificant to him. I still find it difficult to explain why this resonated with me at such a young age and why I am recalling this story over thirty years later. Maybe it was because it began to taint my understanding of how the world was divided and which divisions mattered. Maybe it was because this was the first disruption to my fundamental understanding of countries, an

awakening that the world was not carefully organized into squiggled lines of protagonists and antagonists despite the persistence of those lines on the globes in my classrooms. The colors on the map that I previously understood as the gold standard of earth's organization, the grand nation-states of the 20th century, were not absolute, nor did they tell the whole story of people, culture, and identity.

Many of the political speeches I overheard ended with the phrase "And may God bless America." We prayed to God as a daily ritual in my household, and my Catholic school participated in nation building when we recited the Pledge of Allegiance and sang a patriotic hymn each morning. However, the combination of the two beings in this one closing sentence, God, and America, felt deeply unsettling to me. (And this was not due to the blurring of church-state boundaries in a country that claims secular rule. I was too young to have known that principle and attended a Catholic school where the distinction was mute anyway.) Rather, I felt quite disoriented after the politicians declared this closing phrase to their constituents, with all the hubris in the world, because I was left in a lonely place, wondering about the rest of the planet. After the applause faded, after the dial in our TV clicked to some nightly sitcom like *Cheers*, I would lie in bed wondering, Is God blessing just America? Is he blessing America first and then the other countries? Is he blessing America at the expense of others? Is this a zero-sum game? If America is blessed, are the others cursed? My mother is a grandchild of immigrants and still had family living in Southern Italy. Was she concerned that God was blessing America and not the Italians? And what would the alternative sound like? Should the politicians have said: "And may God bless the world?" But I somehow knew that would not garner the same applause.

Professional Connection

These thoughts created significant confusion and even discontent in my younger self. I remember losing sleep over the issue, and I suppose, decades later, that has not stopped. The United States is still grappling with its reputation and position in world politics and part of that process is the fostering of American values like patriotism and exceptionalism that are impressed through American schools. What does it mean to be American and to be the United States? The notion of American exceptionalism not only exists through the content in the grade school social studies curriculum, but American exceptionalism is in fact molded by these curriculum choices. The content that is both included and excluded in the history curriculum shapes “the pattern of thinking adopted by learners” (Boyer, 1984, p. 23). These choices have created a narrative of American exceptionalism that is deeply ingrained into young children and, for some, deeply disrupted when they become adults. Reexamining the focal content topics of the grade school United States History curriculum is important as the United States faces surmounting challenges: climate crises, widening wealth gap, disenfranchisement, persistent racist structures, misogyny, polarized politics, and threats to democratic processes.

A Teacher and Student of the Survey United States History Regents Course

I grew up in New York State and studied the history of the United States in the traditional sequence over three years. New York State divides the curriculum up chronologically between seventh and eighth grade, usually concluding with the Civil War or Reconstruction in June of seventh grade or September of eighth grade. Students return to U.S. History again in high school during the eleventh grade, with the two most popular options being a Regents U.S. History survey course or Advanced Placement U.S. History from the College Board. Both are taught chronologically from September to June, and both conclude with the NY State Regents exam.

I began teaching 11th grade high school United States history in 2007 and I used mostly prior Regents exams for curriculum guidance. I taught the course by prioritizing content that students were required to know for the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam, which is a high school graduation requirement and a key data point for teacher and school ratings in the state. This exam is also referred to as the U.S. History Regents.

As the years progressed, I attended professional developments at the outstanding locations available in New York City such as the Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian. I read books by authors who were specialists on subjects in U.S. history, whether that be imperialism, racism, foreign affairs, or relationships with Indigenous people (Alexander, 2020; Anderson, 2018; Bass, 2013; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Immerwahr, 2019; Okrent, 2019; Loewen, 2005; Mayers, 2017; Muhammed, 2010; Zinn, 1999). I attended lectures coordinated by the Gilder Lehrman society, and ultimately was inspired to bring this so-called “lost content” to my students. Ironically, the more I learned, the more difficult it became to include these historical developments in the curriculum. The time constraints of adding lost content into a packed course with nearly 400 years of history into nine months was one logistical obstacle. However, there was another, deeper problem emerging when I grappled with the incorporation of significant yet excluded historical developments, such as redlining and settler colonialism, into a curriculum where they had previously been absent. Contextualizing their place created a larger question that is simultaneously straightforward and incredibly complex. Mainly, what is their place in the narrative of the United States? Do they have a place? Or will they forever be “extras?” I have been working to manifest, understand, and explain this issue for several years, and that struggle is the heart of this research. Linda Symcox (1999) participated in the National History Standards Project of the 1990s as both Assistant Director and as a

researcher at University of California Los Angeles, and this experience culminated in her 1999 case study dissertation on the standards and why they were unanimously rejected by the United States Congress. In her introduction, she explained the role of social historians in crafting the national standards as those who sought to include previously excluded voices from the master narrative. In the very next sentence, however, Symcox (1999) acknowledged the complications when she wrote, "...once uncovered, these lives could not be easily incorporated into the traditional narrative of a shared and glorious past" (p. 6). Thus, the history standards with a social emphasis failed to pass with a near total defeat in the United States Senate.

Subjectivity Statement

Researchers must confront their subjectivities throughout their research (Peshkin, 1988; Grant and Osanloo, 2014; Adams, 2016.) My perspectives regarding this research are directly related to teaching and delivering U.S. history curriculum to working class and ethnically diverse students in New York City for over a decade. Undoubtedly, the act of selling this narrative of American progress to various groups has motivated this work.

My mother's family, the people I spent holidays with, the people that shaped my identity as a bearer of culture and ethnicity, is Italian. I am the great-grandchild of Italian immigrants who would be considered white today and yet not entirely white when they stepped onto Ellis Island in 1919, right before the Quota Acts passed, and they were forced to abandon their culture and anglicize their identity. Marietta became Mary, Gaetano became Thomas, and the Italian language was eventually abandoned. I have been afforded all the privileges of a white woman in the late 20th and 21st centuries (McIntosh, 1989), a product of my ancestors successfully shedding their ethnic identity to climb the Anglican hierarchy this country was founded upon. I am a person, like many people in this nation, of a lost and broken identity, an unspoken

generational effort to earn the Whiteness badge at any cost. This process was incremental, ignored, and perpetuated in the school system, and I will feel forever suspended in some cultural, historical purgatory, plagued with a sense of loss over something I never really had, something that was taken from and simultaneously relinquished by my 20th century ancestors. Apple (2019) reported on the direct connection of urban schools as institutions of control over these new immigrants who were considered threats to democracy. Early social scientists “‘struck out’ with a particular passion at the Eastern and Southern European immigrant” (Apple, 2019, p. 73).

Craig (1982) summed up this process in his reflection on the impacts of multiculturalism,

Children were taught contempt for their culture and thus they experienced self-alienation and self-rejection. Many children of the immigration were able to fit into the mainstream of American life and accept the dominant Anglo-Saxon values. Yet the cost included great psychological harm at the personal level and the destruction of ethnic values at the cultural level (p. 2).

I am motivated by this loss because it is rightfully time that the history curriculum of the United States is recognized as an accomplice in this process. The creation of a survey history curriculum is in many ways an art. It is the art of nation-building and the stories that are included and excluded generate the narrative, from subjugated colonies to benevolent giant. Just like in a personal narrative, decisions over content matter. Barone and Eisner (2012) reflected on Barone’s (2002) write-up of research on a troubled Tennessee teen named Billy Charles Barnett; Barone and Eisner (2012) wrote about “what Eckner (1966) called qualitative control” (p. 51). For Barone (2002), this meant the ability to omit from his text the description of certain incidents in the life of Billy Charles, such as a fight on the school bus, and include others, such as the physical abuse by his father. The decisions over included and excluded content are powerful

forces because; as the intellectual historian Hayden White argued, constructed histories are aligned to a narrative style with plot structures and story development that are partly influenced by the historian's imagination (Symcox, 1999). This process is inevitable as all stories are constructed through intersecting forces, including the lens of the historian and the available resources to analyze. As a result of this argument, "historians could no longer consider themselves as mere chroniclers of events, but rather as interpreters" (Symcox, 1999, p. 44).

The story of the United States is not merely sustained via the curriculum pillars in state guides and standardized exams, it is also crafted by these prescriptive permutations. Applebaum (2003) explained that power is not fixed, but rather can "circulate through people, places, and histories" (p. 157). Apple (2019) also wrote that the political and ideological assumptions that guide the curriculum field are hidden from students. Through the inclusion of some events and the exclusion of others, authors of both personal stories and school wide curriculum are capable of preserving power structures and shaping narratives, and then, sometimes, selling those narratives as objective developments, because the assumptions that created them are invisible.

So too in this story of the United States, there are lost perspectives and lost content, hidden voices, and erased experiences, all generating a curriculum that delivers a master narrative and denies students the opportunity to engage in the critical experiences of certain groups of Americans. In reflecting on her own schooling in the 1960s, Symcox (1999) reported that she did not realize she was being schooled with a Western civilization point of view. To her, it was simply *the* point of view. She reflected, "...it never occurred to me that the history of Western civilization itself could represent a hegemonic point of view, with its own self-serving subjectivity..." (p. 19). Boyer (1981) wrote that the "European-oriented Curriculum" (p. 21) impacts the standardized exams students are required to pass, to be promoted, and to graduate. I

attended grade school in the 1980s and 1990s and I was schooled with Western civilization presented as the objective “norm” in both global and United States history courses. Apple (2019) critiqued the consensus built around the norm of middle-class culture in early 20th century curriculum that were designed to be invisible, and this research seeks to understand the continued presence of that norm in standardized 21st century assessments in New York State.

Research Purpose and Questions

Purpose

The intentions of this research were to understand how the multiple-choice questions on a mandatory, high stakes New York state exam generated a story about the United States. The purpose was to examine content for trends and patterns that might reveal oppressions, particularly hidden perspectives concealed behind discourse choices or historical developments that were excluded entirely.

Questions

How did the multiple-choice questions on the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam from 2001-2020 generate a narrative about the story of the United States?

- What patterns and trends were revealed in the included historical developments across the 57 exams?
- Did the language choices in both question formations and response options reflect a narrow perspective or assume a predetermined conclusion?
- Which critical historical developments were excluded entirely from the 2,850 questions?

Problematizing the Research

“It seemed clear to me all year that assaults on contemporary American democracy went hand in hand with attempts to narrow the teaching of American history to a single narrative,”- George J. Sanchez, as President of the Organization of American Historians (Sanchez, 2021, p. 256).

“How do we discuss both the origins of American racism and its manifestations- past and present- in a way that leads to mutual understanding and a desire for change? Is that even possible?”- Nic Stone, in her foreword to Carol Anderson’s *We Are Not Yet Equal* (2018) (Stone, 2018, p. xi).

The concept of culturally responsive education was embraced by the New York State Education Department when they adopted the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education framework (CRSE). Education professionals were commissioned to create and publish this framework as a guide for K-12 educators. The introduction of this 64-page document put forth by the New York State Education Department (2019) complies with the federal government’s Every Student Succeeds Act passed in 2015. It proclaims:

A complex system of biases and structural inequities is... deeply rooted in our country’s history, culture, and institutions. This system of inequity — which routinely confers advantage and disadvantage based on linguistic background, gender, skin color, and other characteristics — must be clearly understood, directly challenged, and fundamentally transformed” (p. 6).

The idea that this complex system of biases and structural inequities “must be clearly understood” (New York State Education Department, 2019, p. 6) is a critical clause in the text, because the system cannot be challenged or transformed unless it is understood. According to the

New York State Education Department, these systems are deeply rooted in our country's history, which is mainly taught to students through the history curriculum, a mandatory requirement for high school graduation.

The document hints at the recognition and rejection of a master narrative. Despite this proclamation, there is still not a clear proposal for how history teachers will identify and conceptualize the content associated with the master narrative, or how they will locate the historical developments that are deeply rooted in the nation's history but have been traditionally marginalized, exceptionized, or excluded. To quote Adams (2016) in his chapter on a book designed to guide social justice facilitators, "Assumptions that the content of learning is neutral ignore... the focus on dominant social groups at the core of the curriculum" (p. 28). The content in history courses is not neutral, and the content in the United States history curriculum has supported and continues to support narratives of American progress for certain groups at the expense of other groups.

The guidance for history teachers to acquire and teach important content that challenges the master narrative has been uneven and inconsistent, especially since the United States Senate voted against the National History Standards in 1995. Ladson-Billings (1998) was one of the early researchers to report on culturally relevant pedagogy and delineate its purpose, which is to develop cultural competency in students and a "critical consciousness in order to challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). In seeking to cultivate a sociopolitical consciousness, Banks and Banks (2010) cited textbooks as obstacles and one factor that has "slowed the institutionalization of multicultural education" (p. 253). Apple (2019) wrote that textbooks avoid critical material that can cause a "negative reaction by powerful groups" (p. 205). Ladson-Billings (1998) reported that teachers often critiqued the content in their textbooks

and, as a result, teachers sometimes supplement the curriculum with articles and papers that address the content deficiencies in traditional grade school history courses. The purpose of this search outside of district or state provided curriculum resources is “to help the students develop multiple perspectives on a variety of social and historical perspectives” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 162). Gay (2002) stated that teachers interested in a multi-cultural education must conduct a “deep cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials” (p. 108). In Loewen’s (2007) iconic work, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, his dedication page states, “Dedicated to all American history teachers who teach against their textbook (and their ranks are growing)” (p. v). A study of the New York State standards in Global History revealed that, although New York was more inclusive in its standards than other states, most of the standards, especially those related to developments before 1945, revolve around a European construct. Marino & Bolgatz (2010), who conducted this study, reported that:

For example, although New York is one of the rare states to mention modern Latin America, the “Age of Revolution” is largely a European construct defined by European events. Further, the organizational premise above illustrates one of the key features of a western civilization orientation, which is that the history of the 19th century is dominated by events from European history (p. 381).

The recognition of curriculum deficiencies in textbooks and state exams is acknowledged by some, especially veteran educators oriented towards social justice. In concluding their report on the culturally destructive English Language Arts curricula, Khan et al. (2022) suggested that teachers should provide multiple perspectives and diverse context. However, the strategy of ad hoc pursuits by teachers for supplemental resources is unsustainable and inequitable because it relies on individual teachers to research these content and contextual deficiencies, find

appropriate resources for students, and create these lessons in isolation. It also assumes that these deficiencies in the included content and permutation of that content is somehow acceptable, or at the very least inevitable, and the solution lands on the laps of social justice teachers. To further problematize this approach, one may ask how teachers will even know where to begin in identifying these deficiencies, as some teachers lack “first-hand experience of the way inequities are structured into the educational and social system” (Pantić, 2015, p. 768). Some teachers themselves are products of the master narrative (Marx & Larson, 2012) and may not have the direction and support to begin their search for meaningful context, context that has been living in the shadows of the master narrative for decades. In this arbitrary way, every child is not guaranteed access to a robust array of critical, yet traditionally excluded content that is needed to understand historical developments in the United States from multiple perspectives. As a result, the standard narrative based on American exceptionalism and white supremacy persists in different ways, and the understanding of America’s history is contingent upon a student’s individual teacher or district.

This is problematic because a culturally responsive education is important for all students, not just students of color. Zimmerman (2004) researched the battles to remove racist material from American textbooks in the 20th century. He reported that Black activists were not only focused on removing racist material to protect black students psychologically, but also for the White students. These activists rejected the logic from *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) that “the evil of segregation lay solely in its effect upon African Americans” (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 60). Rather, the negative impacts of segregation and racist materials in textbooks harm all students. Zimmerman (2004) explained his logic here, “If White children absorbed the story’s message of Black-as-buffoon, Spottswood [a Black leader out of

Washington D.C.] argued, they would balk when African Americans demanded the same rights and privileges as other citizens” (p. 56). In 2012, Harmon explained Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy as one that encourages students of color to “develop a critical consciousness, which empowers them to challenge the status quo” (Harmon, 2012, p. 13). But the emphasis of challenging the status quo among students of color might create further divisions if some students are *critically reflecting* on the status quo while others are being *enculturated into* the status quo. A robust and diverse array of curriculum resources for all students would serve the educational goals of advancing democracy and social justice.

When teachers add supplemental resources to a curriculum that is steeped in the master narrative, it will in turn challenge the master narrative, and teachers must be prepared for the dissonance that disruption will create. According to the popular teacher rating system by Charlotte Danielson, teachers are now expected to question traditional narratives. The Danielson Rubric (2013) stated that highly effective teachers “invite students to...challenge previously held views... make connections previously believed to be unrelated, and to arrive at new understandings of complex material” (p. 28). This work is now expected of teachers and yet the blueprint to move forward into more critical pedagogy is still vaguely based on uneven and ambiguous suggestions. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) reported that, “The teachers in Foster’s (1997) and Ladson-Billings’ (1995) studies implemented the idea that the content of the curriculum needs to be inclusive of all cultures represented in the classroom” (p. 74) and that culturally relevant pedagogy “uses counter storytelling as a legitimate critique of the mainstream master narrative” (p. 75). It is important to recognize that U.S. history teachers, working intimately with the content and narratives from the 17th through 21st centuries to create lessons for students, must be able to recognize the content pillars that build and maintain the master

narrative. This work requires a series of unpacking because the master narrative has been preserved in the curriculum for over one hundred years. As Apple (2019) stated, curriculum pioneers from the turn of the 20th century “served the rather conservative interests of homogeneity and social control” (p. 80).

In beginning to understand the future of a curriculum redesign, one must first examine where the curriculum has been, what it has emphasized, and the narratives that it has delivered, both intentionally and unintentionally. History educators must know where they have been and what the curriculum has been cultivating, to plan for where they are going. The CRSE (2019) framework hints generally at this past curriculum with language like the “complex system of biases and structural inequities is deeply rooted in our country’s history, culture, and institutions” (p. 6). However, no further details or examinations of the past are provided in the framework.

One of these institutions the CRSE (2019) referenced is the American public school system, and particularly the survey United States history course at the high school level. Unlike other history courses that examine the United States through one focused topic, a survey course is responsible for generating a narrative about *the essential story* of the United States. It participates in building the collective memory of the young citizens who will soon be voting adults in the system. Therefore, examining the inequities in this curriculum is of particular importance if the education system of New York seeks to genuinely disrupt a narrative of oppression and inequity.

This topic is framed as a critical, theoretical perspective and is also shaped by my experience as a teacher of United States History in the New York City public school system for almost two decades. The problem as I understand it is with the language and the permutation of content in the New York State U.S. history curriculum as manifested in the New York State U.S.

History Regents exam. The course of study marginalizes, exceptionizes, or excludes significant historical developments that would serve to embody multiple perspectives and cultivate a culturally relevant curriculum.

Operational Definitions

1. Master Narrative - The United States has patterned itself after Eurocentric perspectives (Boyer, 1981; McCormick, 1984), and these perspectives persist into the 21st century where the master narrative is covertly delivered through the included content in the U.S. history curriculum. This supports the interpretation of America's trajectory as exceptional, inclusive, progressive, unified, and democratic. The narrative relies on all-encompassing phrases like "one people" or "Americans." Symcox (1999) described critiques of the 1981 California history standards, which clarified their vision by stating in the introduction that although the United States is pluralistic, they are still one people who are all Americans. This critique captured the essence of the master narrative as it exists in survey American history courses. Symcox (1999) summarized the critique that history had become "a continuum of inevitability, of progress, of 'destiny' starting with European arrival and colonization, the inevitable, if unfortunate conquest of Native American, the inhumane enslavement of Africans to replenish the original Native American and the democratic institution based on Judeo-Christian European tradition" (p. 91). While significant oppressive developments, such as the extermination of Indigenous people, are not ignored in the survey course, they are exceptionized (a term introduced below) to preserve the master narrative. Below are some ways different aspects of the master narrative in the United States that have been researched and described, and these have shaped my understanding of the maser narrative.

- a. Apple (2019) reported that the foundation of curriculum as a field was from and designed to maintain White, middle-class values to preserve the community, as they [early curriculum founders like Franklin Bobbitt] saw increased diversity as a threat to the American community and “like-mindedness” (p. 71).
- b. Khan et al. (2022), in their critique of popular ELA curricula resources, defined the dominant group as “historically advantaged by social, political, and economic systems in this country [United States] (i.e.: white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.)” (p. 21)
- c. Akenson (1987) researched mid-20th century social studies texts and found that they normally provided students with “a bland, conflict free, conceptually limited, middle-class view upon the world” (p. 168).
- d. Horsford and D’Amico (2015) explained how the narrative of progress is used in American education. Former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan used progressive platitudes in 2015 to garner support for his agenda by describing the past as outdated while the future was bright and hopeful. “Tropes of progress, much like those of exceptionalism, have social value as myths... [and are] comforting and powerful” (p. 865). This progress narrative is part of the master narrative of the United States and is critically examined in the research.
- e. Anecdotes from Novick (1988) captured the white supremacist origins of the history discipline. He wrote “In the early decades of the twentieth century the most professionally accomplished work on Reconstruction...- was viciously racist” (p. 14). Also, to demonstrate the anti-Semitism in higher education, he shared advice that a mid-20th century Wisconsin professor offered to dissuade his

Jewish graduate students hoping to study history, “‘History belongs to the Anglo-Saxon’” (p. 172).

- f. Dozono’s (2020) research of the New York state history curriculum found that “The European identity of the White-male-capitalist-enlightened-liberal-subject takes precedence, consuming all possibilities of ‘otherness’ under its terms” (p. 5).
- g. Lastly, I would like to clarify my understanding of Eurocentric perspectives, which are cited by other scholars and referenced throughout this paper, as a continuation of a Europe swallowed whole by patriarchal Christianity and motivated by land ownership and control. Europe is a diverse multi-cultural continent, but Eurocentric references reflect first a Christianized Europe and second an imperial Europe. This is not a Europe where folk culture flourished, where women were venerated as both mothers and religious beings, where trees, stones, and water were revered as spiritual shrines. Eurocentric perspectives are a Europe where women who prayed to their gods near a river were persecuted, where spirituality was confiscated by church authorities and prayer was only permitted in physical structures, towering over the land and supervised under clerical watch (Dashu, 2016). It is a Europe where the connections between earth and spirituality and feminism were shattered, and folk cultural practices were either assimilated into misogynistic Christian practices, silenced, erased, or demonized by an all-consuming, power hungry centralizing authority. Ultimately, when citing Eurocentric perspectives, it is important to remember that Christianity imperialized Europe before Europe imperialized the world.

In conclusion, as a result of conceptions in previous research, this research understands the master narrative in United States history as one that denotes egalitarianism, progress, meritocracy, capitalism, and exceptionalism as core to the inception and evolution of a democratically conceived United States, with underlying currents of white supremacy, Eurocentrism, hereditary aristocracy, and patriarchy.

2. Schematic Narrative Template (SNT) - was conceptualized by Werstch (2008) as a narrative that explains a country's origins, values, successes, and identity. It is general in nature and influential in shaping how citizens think and feel about the nation. For example, the SNT of the United States is that America was built on democratic values that sought to disperse power and provide economic opportunity. Social mobility is a core concept in the American SNT, as is the inevitability of the United States to spread from Atlantic Ocean to Pacific Ocean and rise to the status of global superpower. Efforts are made to preserve the SNT in the way individual details and developments are molded to fit the storyline in the history curriculum. Perspectives and content are excluded to ensure the SNT survives.
3. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) - is explained by Ladson-Billings (1995) as an education that values multiple perspectives, experiences, and systems of knowing. CRP is by nature interrogatory of the master narrative, which has been preserved in state standards and curriculum (Brown and Brown, 2010; Shear et al., 2015).
 - a. This research seeks to better understand the master narrative, because, as Brown and Brown (2010) explained, "teachers need historical and sociocultural knowledge to identify inaccurate historical narratives within the official school text [otherwise] we run the risk of reproducing a population of adults who possess

problematic perspectives about the historical and contemporary problems about race and racism in schools and society” (p. 151).

4. Culturally Destructive Curriculum - this definition is from New York University’s research on English Language Arts curriculum by Khan et al. (2022). Culturally destructive curriculum “reinforces stereotypes, centers White or Eurocentric ideas or culture [with] microaggressions, biases, and deficit perspectives” (p. 42).
5. Marginalized Content - is presented as a sidenote to a larger narrative.
 - a. An example would be the role of property in the early United States when studying the Declaration of Independence and the early governments. While a discussion might ensue in history classes about Jefferson’s swap of Locke’s “property,” with “pursuit of happiness,” there is no attempt in the curriculum to understand the role of property in the transition away from the Articles of Confederation and towards the Constitution. Shays’ Rebellion is normally presented as a radical wake-up call to the United States (the property-owning elite) for a strengthened national government. When the wealthy fought against tyrannical British taxes, they were hailed as heroes, but Daniel Shays is presented as a dangerous rebel (Zinn, 1980). The legacy of people like Daniel Shays is told from one side, where the results of his rebellion must point to democratic progress, because any other interpretation would interfere with the master narrative. This analysis from Zinn (1999), that Shays represented the exploited, working-class revolutionary war veterans, is not new, but it has yet to find its way into the mainstream curriculum as an acceptable interpretation.

6. Exceptionized Content - is content that is presented as an exception to a larger, often positive narrative, and therefore forgives the oppressive behavior because it is presented as inevitable or necessary for the general term “American progress.”
- a. An example would be the narrative of Andrew Jackson democratizing America as the first president from the Democratic Party, an offshoot of the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans, and as the representative of the poor White man from the back country (Wilentz, 2005). Jackson’s support for the Indian Removal Act, with catastrophic consequences for Indigenous People in the Southeast, is presented as an exception to the overall success of his first term.
 - b. Another example would be the establishment of the United States in 1783 as a democratic and enlightened nation-state while still protecting the institution of chattel slavery in the colonies turned to states. The developments of racial segregation and slavery date back to the 17th century when, as a result of the 1676 Bacon’s Rebellion, White planter elite fears of a poor White and Black union resulted in harsh racial laws that cemented generational segregation into Jamestown society (Bell et al., 2016a, Harris, 1993; Patterson, 2007). Therefore, Alexander (2020) concluded, “Before democracy, chattel slavery in America was born” (p. 31), and slavery hardly interfered with the inception of a purportedly democratic American nation-state.
 - c. In regard to industrialization, the business practices of Carnegie and Rockefeller are described in most textbooks, however, the conclusions focus on their philanthropy, donations, and advancement of the American economy (Cole et al., 2011). This forced consensus exceptionizes their behavior by suggesting the

economy would falter without some sort of exploitation, and their philanthropic donations justify their massive wealth.

7. Excluded Content - is content that constitutes a major historical development with serious consequences for Americans but is neither taught nor referenced during the course. It does not appear on state exams. According to discourse analysis expert Fairclough (2003), exclusions “may be political or socially significant” (p. 149). Shear et. al. (2015) stated that excluded voices and events in the curriculum impacts all students. Apple (2019) wrote that “economic and political power is represented through knowledge *made available* (and *not* made available) to students” (p. 6). (Italic emphasis is from the original author). Harris (1984) defined biases in textbooks as “the invisibility of minority groups, stereotyping, [and] selectivity” (p. 27). Lastly, in his review of white supremacy in the New York state global history curriculum, Dozono (2020) wrote that “...silence functions to limit possibilities of knowing” (p. 19). This is an important recognition because Brown & Brown’s (2010) study concluded “what students learn, and fail to learn, will impact the socio-cultural knowledge base they will develop about the role race and racial equality played and continues to play, in the United States” (p.150-151). This includes all students, a concept that was emphasized by Rodriguez (1980), who wrote that multi-cultural education is not only a “favor for the ethnic minority student” (p. 17) but is a right of the majority student who is entitled to “intellectual freedom” (p. 18) in learning about diverse experiences and perspectives.
 - a. An example from the 20th century would be excluding content on redlining, fostered by the Roosevelt Administration as part of the New Deal. LaDale and Michney (2021) reported in detail on the federal government’s adoption of a

clearly segregationist policy, one that widened the access gap to the middle class for Whites and nonwhites. “HOLC (Homeowners’ Loan Corporation) used the power of the federal government to formalize patterns of segregation and discrimination” (LaDale & Michney, 2021, p. 42). The social, economic, and political consequences of denying mortgages to Black Americans is incalculable and generational, and the culpability of the federal government in this development cannot be ignored, however it is not in the curriculum. Muhammad (2010) summarized the exclusion as follows, “...northern white liberals and progressives were a big part of the history of racism in America’s criminal justice system, a major correction to most histories that focused exclusively on southern racists with their lynch mobs and chain gangs” (p. xi). Bell (2016) wrote that Americans must understand the culminating factors that sustain the racial wealth gap, and redlining is one of the factors from the last hundred years.

- b. The exclusion of coverture from the narrative on women’s rights is absolute, it is never mentioned. The 19th amendment is championed as the conclusion of voting equality for women (Trecker, 1971), whilst ignoring the patriarchy that developed and continued to restrict women under local coverture laws carried over hundreds of years earlier from Europe. The failed Equal Rights Amendment occasionally appears on state exams but is never connected to coverture.
- c. This is also referred to as a hidden curriculum and is problematic because not only is the content hidden but the conflict and complexity the infusion of that content would expose is also hidden. According to Apple (2019), the hidden curriculum recreates hegemony.

- d. For example, the impact of omitting significant labor accomplishment and analysis (such as the connection between union organizing and assembly rights in the First Amendment) from the survey curriculum is summarized nicely by Cole et al. (2011), “Such a bowdlerized approach to U.S. history fails students.... To give them a lens to... meet challenges that still plague our nation’s effort to be a democracy... It turns history into pablum” (p. 17).

Document analysis was the primary data collection method, and the documents are a standardized high school assessment. This connects with the constructionism perspective because a historical narrative is influenced by culture and constructed by the types of questions the historian asks. History is a subjective field, contrary to the positions pushed by Western scholars which is that the history as the West constructs it is the one, true history. According to DeMarrais and Lapan (2004), “...history is an interpretation of the past... and it is the historian who does the interpretation. There is no history until historians tell it and it is the way in which they tell it that becomes what we know as history” (p. 33). Throughout much of time, the only documents preserved have been from those in power, those literate and important enough to record their experiences (Villaverde et al., 2006). Brown and Au (2014) argued that curriculum studies have also been dominated by White, male voices, and that “scholars of color consistently argue that curriculum is not neutral but has the capacity to reproduce one’s personal and material realities” (p. 378). Social studies educators must pay particular attention to finding hidden experiences. The goal of this research is to evaluate the master narrative of the survey U.S. history curriculum in the State of New York and to create space for other narratives, excluded historical developments that have been researched and exposed by experts in the field but remain in the high school curriculum shadows.

A democratic society is a society committed to continuous evaluation and evolution. Cummings (2019) reported on the value of grappling with conflict together, “Helping students to critique controversial events in history with their peers allows them to reconcile the widely different views of history that may be held by different students. This group endeavor also teaches students the skills of understanding, relating to, and critiquing others’ perspectives” (p. 284). Marshall and Gram (2022) concurred that the master narrative should not be replaced with another one but rather students should be provided with a wide array of evidence and given the chance to derive their own conclusions about the story of the United States. However, we have failed to recognize as educators what a radical departure this is from traditional national histories, which center content around a hardy and patriotic story embedded as a schematic narrative template into the national consciousness. Apple (2019) explained this narrative was designed to preserve the middle class and instill values around democracy generally, while maintaining class relations, with certain groups earning their spot at the top and others deserving of the bottom.

A democratic society is an ideal, not an end. The U.S. History curriculum serves to support the narrative that the United States achieved some democratic goals in 1776 and continued to strive for and achieve those declared ideals throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and into the present. To emphasize the striving component, I prefer to use the phrase *American democratic experiment* in my classroom rather than simply *American democracy*, to remind students that democracy is a vision we work towards rather an end or a victory to be declared. In Stoller’s (2015) critique of the learning outcome movement, he explained the restrictive nature of prescribed learning outcomes as anti-democratic and summarized Dewey’s conception of democracy. Stoller (2015) wrote “...for Dewey, democracy is not a fixed end which is reached,

but instead a platform on which unique ends-in-view emerge and are reconstructed based on the needs of the people” (p. 328). Furthermore, striving for democracy is not a triumph in and of itself when efforts to disperse power in the name of democracy among certain groups is contingent on exploiting other groups. Therefore, examining excluded content on widely administered standardized exams is important.

Summary

The survey United States history curriculum is more than a collection of past events, it generates an understanding of the vision and mission of a nation that proclaims to be the center of the democratic world, the western hemisphere’s first modern democratic nation-state, and an example for developing nations around the world. To support this interpretation of the nation-state known as the United States in the high school survey curriculum, certain events and perspectives from the past are highlighted while others are marginalized, exceptionized, or ignored completely.

The focus of culturally responsive pedagogy research emphasizes the inclusion of multiple perspectives. This research seeks to understand how these two pedagogies might intersect: the master narrative generated (often covertly) through the inclusion of specific events with a focus on a singular perspective and singular gains, with multiple perspectives generated from oppressed voices that were often sacrificed for collective progress. The research seeks to explore the consensus that is forced from the master narrative because the norm for curriculum should in fact be grounded in “conflict, instability, and disagreement, because the process is one of construction followed by deconstruction, followed by construction... of what students [should] have an opportunity to learn” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 149). To achieve this mission,

this research sought to understand how the traditional story of the United States, as an inclusive, progressive, and exceptional democracy has been produced through selected content and permutation of that content on New York State standardized exams. The U.S. History and Government Regents exam is a high stakes exam because the exam impacts teachers' final ratings and is required for students to graduate high school. Regents pass rates are published on public websites and exam outcomes drive inquiry cycles and instructional foci in New York high schools.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Survey United States history courses are important because they contribute to the story of the United States as a nation-state in the modern world. The story is delivered to the younger generation through many facets of the U.S. history course, from content and vocabulary choices to the permutation of events, which mold a narrative about the country's creation, intentions, and direction. In the words of Schmidt (2012) writing about women in the curriculum, "curriculum is a mechanism that communicates social normalcy to young people... The curriculum is written such that it repeatedly performs normal constructs and omits or marginalizes counter constructs" (p. 710). Traditionally, the curriculum has presented a singular perspective and shied away from controversial issues, like "racism, historical atrocities, powerlessness, and hegemony" (Gay, 2002, p. 107). The research on culturally relevant education has recognized a master narrative (Brayboy, 2006; Smith, 1999; Shear et al., 2015) and emphasized the importance of inclusive multicultural curriculum materials that challenge this narrative (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Banks and Banks, 2010). The master narrative is cloaked in Enlightenment language from the late 1700s and continues to generate notions of meritocracy in the American education system. Dozono (2020) shared Mills' (1997) analysis of the Enlightenment as one that resulted in a "system of white supremacy, [acting as] the underlying racialized political contract that predetermines and limits any possibility of social contract" (p. 4). Meritocracy denotes fairness and opportunity, which blend principles of democracy and capitalism from the transition of the thirteen British colonies into political entities belonging to one greater nation-state. Gorski (2016) questioned the grit and deficit ideology that permeates teacher perceptions and advocated for a shift towards a structural ideology amongst educators. This ideology would recognize America is rife with "economic injustice, exploitation, and inequity" (Gorski, 2016, p. 380) and

that students are inherently struggling to survive and thrive because of these oppressions. However, in order to subscribe to Gorski's (2016) suggestions, educators must be willing to create space for alternate interpretations of the American narrative, where students are not forced to exceptionize oppression and are free to challenge the typical positive conclusions regarding America's developments. The audience of America's history matters, and if the curriculum is a "culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18), then racially speaking, the audience has traditionally benefitted from the master narrative interpretation. Darling-Hammond (2010) stated, "...until the 1960s, many communities did not even have high schools for Black students, Mexican American students, or American Indian students..." (p. 102) and Littlefield (1999) reported that tax appropriations for African American schools in the South was almost nonexistent from 1900-1920. The curriculum conclusions that have been preserved through the survey U.S. history course from the master narrative are that the United States is not a white supremacist nation, but that it is a democracy with a loose and flexible social hierarchy, a democracy with mobility and equal opportunity for all, a democracy where prior mistakes are lessons learned, and a country where hard work is the main determinant for success. Of course, the definitions of who qualifies as *White* have also changed over time (Okrent, 2019), and American laws determined that whiteness was "race plus privilege" (Harris, 1993, p. 1738).

A culturally responsive education that incorporates multiple perspectives has been at the doorstep of the master American narrative (Symcox, 1999), and the question is, how vulnerable can the master narrative be to the interrogation of an increasing number of multiple perspectives and alternative interpretations? The concept of American exceptionalism and American multiculturalism have attempted to exist in tandem in a public-school classroom where diverse

voices and experiences are welcomed. Said (1993) stated that “On the whole it is better to explore history rather than to repress or deny it; the fact that the United States contains so many histories, many of them now clamoring for attention, is by no means to be suddenly feared and out of them an American society and politics were in fact created” (xxvi). However, this research seeks to explore the persistence of the master narrative in the curriculum despite these multiple histories. Apple (2019) reported that the control of cultural institutions is important because it “enhances the power of particular classes to control others” (p. 15). A culturally responsive curriculum, one that embraces and seeks multiple perspectives, might not coexist peacefully alongside the master narrative, not explicitly because of the multiple perspectives but because of the multiple interpretations of America’s story that those perspectives might generate.

The nature of American democracy, which is a core theme in America’s schematic narrative template (Werstch, 2008), is the totality of justice. Democracy is an all-encompassing concept: justice is blind, Lady Liberty welcomes all, and opportunity waits for the ambitious. This concept is difficult to interrogate, as it is plural and comprehensive by definition. Therefore, groups that attempt to explain another experience within this democracy, an experience that aligns more with a rigid hierarchy possibly described as a caste (Alexander, 2010) rather than egalitarian principles, could explain the incompatibility between the master narrative and the complexity from multiple perspectives. If the purpose of an American history course is to nation build, then the master narrative serves a particular audience the nation was built for. But if an American history course seeks to nurture historical thinking skills, if it provides students the opportunity to “listen to a full chorus of voices... to embrace a web of narratives about the past” (Marshall & Gram, 2022, p. 791), then students are acting as historians and are generating their own narratives. As educators, we can create a space for the master narrative to be vulnerable to

culturally responsive, multicultural pedagogy, and not mollify forces that seek to preserve a master, patriotic narrative via legislation (Westhoff & Johnston, 2021). This work is not easy, as Wertsch (2008) stated that collective memory responsible for nation-building preserves the master narrative and is in opposition with the analytical perspective from the discipline of formal history. Hansen and James (2016) analyzed Dewey's focus on creating a democratic learning environment for students, one that purposely nurtures cooperation and communication to reject the anti-democratic forces of their environment outside of school. The authors not only clarified the forces Dewey wrote about as "violence, intolerance, bigotry, anti-intellectualism ..." (Hansen & James, 2016, p. 104) but also wrote about the importance of identifying and reflecting on these forces. Part of identifying these forces is understanding how they live in the current permutation of the U.S. history curriculum.

This review of the literature is multi-fold. Parts of the research seek the expertise and reporting from experts in particular content areas, such as African American history, democracy and voting, labor movements, American foreign policy, and Indigenous People. These developments are sometimes excluded and sometimes exceptionized in the traditional curriculum, yet they contextualize the master narrative and situate the dynamics of the usual content pillars on the New York State Regents exams. The review of literature also includes research on frameworks that have evolved in curriculum and instruction decisions in social studies classrooms. The research includes theoretical foundations in multicultural curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2010), culturally relevant education (Ladson Billings, 1995), anti-racist education (Apple, 2019), and social justice education (Adams & Bell, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The theory of this research embodies a critical perspective. According to Bhattacharya (2017) there are three purposes of qualitative research: to understand, to interrogate, and to deconstruct. Evaluating survey United States history through a critical lens is an interrogation of a traditional narrative, one where historical development both included and excluded in the curriculum are positioned to service the story of the United States as exceptional, progressive, and democratic. This tradition of centering Western culture dates to scholars who sought to preserve Western civilization as the primary source of knowledge, thus positioning all other knowledge and voices as secondary (Symcox, 1999). Brown and Au (2014) reported on the overwhelming presence of White male voices in curriculum history. A small number of selected African Americans are included in curriculum history studies, such as Booker T. Washington or W.E.B. DuBois, but most other voices that contributed to curriculum outside of White middle class America are ignored, such as “churches, bookstores, colleges, and political organizations” (Brown & Au, 2014, p. 379). This positioning is achieved through the inclusion of carefully cultivated historical developments and the exclusion of other events. Cherryholmes (1988) wrote that “Curriculum is what students have an opportunity to learn. What students have an opportunity to learn depends upon what they do not have an opportunity to learn” (p. 144). Thus, the sequence of events in the curriculum, which is neither an inclusive nor objective representation of the past, requires further investigation.

Research into the content of the U.S. history curriculum, and the narrative it cultivates, falls under a constructionism perspective, because this research assumes that the designation of winners in the American democratic experiment is a subjective category, dependent on a particular perspective. This epistemology, this way of understanding the story of the United

States, considers the possibility of a culturally responsive pedagogy through the curriculum design by genuinely infusing multiple perspectives into the story of the United States and then allowing space for students to derive their own conclusions about the key tenets of this nation.

The United States history curriculum has been marketed as an objective narrative of general progress and exceptionalism, with acts of oppression against some presented as an inevitable but worthwhile casualty of the nation's evolution. It is grounded in a Eurocentric framework that is not openly declared but covertly serves as the skeleton around which the rest of the curriculum is constructed. In their recent evaluation of three popular English Language Arts curricula in the United States., Khan et al. (2022) found that "White culture and values were presented as objective ways of thinking and interacting" (p. 27). Rather than being presented as a framework of choice, it is, more subversively and cleverly, presented as the norm (Delgado Bernal, 2002). All other ways of thinking and knowing are delegitimized because they are othered, because they create knowledge outside of this system. This othering has been consequential for over one thousand years, dating to the Christianization of Europe, when "anything that did not take a Christianized form... was banned and eventually feared" (Dashu, 2016, p. 28).

Twenty-First Century Connections

Freire (1993) was a central theoretical framework for this research. He explained his pedagogy as one that interrogates narratives, empowers students, and highlights the intersection of pedagogy with content chosen for the curriculum. Freire named a curriculum with cherrypicked facts lacking analysis as a "banking education [that] attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world" (Freire, 1993, p. 56). In the banking education model, information is deposited for student to absorb as

objective truths, as opposed to, critical education that invites analysis and “sets itself the task of demythologizing” (Freire, 1993, p. 56). Apple (2019) concurred that the orientation in American schools is students are treated as “value-receiving persons rather than as value-creating persons” (p. 95). In addition, Freire (1993) believed that critical pedagogy is not stagnant but rather focused on the transforming nature of reality. The traditional U.S. history curriculum is mostly presented as static and complete, one where the chosen content is collectively conclusive in the trajectory of the United States, which is as a nation-state rightly fulfilling the prized role of global leader and democratic example for the world to follow. Movement is presented as progressive, where Americans learn from mistakes (usually from many decades or centuries ago) and do not repeat them, and where the past is divorced from the present. One specific example is during the Progressive Era, where students are taught about the signing of the Pure Food and Drug Act. This is a staple of early 20th century domestic history and serves as an example where the powers of the federal government were balanced against the powers of corporations for the benefit of the public. Capitalist values were maintained but their regulation via the FDA ensured safer food, informative labeling, and sanitary conditions. This is presented as both an evolving accomplishment for American democracy and a settled issue. However, regulation of corporate power is still highly contentious in the 21st century, whether it be from the FDA or other federal regulatory agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency. The balance between corporate freedom and consumer safety is ongoing, and despite dramatic and high-profile evidence, the inclusion of this ongoing struggle, and its connection to Progressive Era events, is absent from the curriculum. To illustrate, one possible example among many could be the tragic Boeing crashes in 2016 and 2018, when two Max 737 airplanes crashed and killed a total of 346 people. Regulatory issues involving the Federal Aviation Administration and Boeing, a company that

was trying to avoid the cost of pilot training for their new aircraft, is a clear and relatable example for students to analyze. Kitrioff and Gelles (2019) reported “Boeing scored one of its biggest lobbying wins: a law that undercuts the government’s role in approving the design of new airplanes” (p. 1). Most importantly, this example demonstrates the continuing nature of the efforts of corporations to secure deregulation victories at the expense of American (and now global) consumers. Regulation is an ongoing issue that was not settled during the Progressive Era but rather just beginning. However, the chronological design of the curriculum and the emphasis on a positive trajectory prevents students from connecting important corporate regulatory events from the 20th and 21st centuries. While the field of historical study has traditionally kept past and present apart for fear of imprinting one set of values on the other, critical historians advocate for “affirmative presentism” (Villaverde et al., 2006, p. 326) and encourage an exploration of the relationship between past and present, to understand the links, and reveal the connection points for students of history to investigate. Goswami et al. (2014) wrote that capitalism must be examined in historic terms and that “Grasping the influence of capitalism’s trends in the present requires a rich sense of historically recurrent processes, constraints, and possibilities” (p. 2). Khan et al. (2022) concurred that “Censoring critical details that provide students with the knowledge to understand how and why current political climates relate to past events stunts their learning” (p. 30). In their report on high school history textbooks, Cole et al. (2011) found them lacking in their description of “continuing issues facing labor, such as the growth of multinational corporations and their exporting of jobs overseas” (p. 19) This is problematic because, according to Apple (2019) “The ‘reality’ of society is conflict and flux, not a ‘closed-function system’” (p. 99). Symcox (1999) summarized Apple’s point by explaining that “the curriculum is more often a tool of social control than social transformation. The curriculum

indoctrinated students with a false consensus” (p. 22). Yet in the high school history curriculum, consensus is predetermined and conflict from the past is selectively curated where issues are presented as solved due to the permutation of events, conflict first and resolution second; it is never resolution and then conflict because that would show regression. The progress narrative is careful to show the corrections of any mistakes by ordering events as mistake first and resolution second. They are not ordered the other way. For example, a standardized exam might show a document about a Louisiana grandfather clause in the 1890s followed by a document from the National Voting Rights Act (NVRA) in 1965. The order is important because it shows the latter (NVRA) correcting the former (racially motivated disenfranchisement). However, the curriculum does not arrange democratic events first and anti-democratic events second. The NVRA would not be followed by an excerpt from *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) which gutted Sections 4 and 5 of the NVRA and increased widespread disenfranchisement (Anderson, 2018). That order, with the *Shelby* (2013) decision second after the NVRA, would imply a retraction of democracy and democratic regression. This would be contradictory to both progress and exceptionalism in the master narrative of U.S. history.

This exclusion of critical 21st century content, along with the consistent *inclusion* of the signing of, for example the Meat Inspection Act and creation of the FDA, creates a narrative for students that the issue of regulating industry to protect consumers is over because it was solved in 1906. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained the evolution of qualitative research starting in 1900, from colonized superiority to a crisis of representation and a postmodern period struggling to make sense of the crises. However, the authors make sure to clarify that they are not “implying a progress narrative in our history. We are not saying that the cutting edge is located in the present. We are saying the present is a politically charged space” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 20). This

recognition is quite different from a U.S. history course, where the survey curriculum is still covertly delivering a progress narrative through the evidence that is both presented to and hidden from students and teachers. As a United States history teacher, I taught the conclusive victory of the Pure Food and Drug Act in isolation from other modern regulatory developments for many years. Yet these more modern developments would not only interest students but allow them to connect curriculum dots and engage in discourse on continuity and change as it exists in the 21st century. Connecting content to the students' present day, to the community and world around them, is an important concept in culturally relevant and multicultural teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Banks & Banks, 2010; Fischer, 2022).

A Survey Course with a Goal

Delgado Bernal (2002) shared that Ladson-Billings (1995) expanded the definition of epistemology as not just a way of thinking but a system of knowing. This research sought to infuse other systems of knowing into the standard curriculum, to recognize multiple perspectives, to deconstruct the collective *we* pronouns when referring to national achievements, and to reject the narrative of American exceptionalism, where the sacrifice of some is acceptable for the success of others. Crotty (1998) wrote about the grip of culture in the constructionism perspective:

The *mélange* of culture and sub-cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught, and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation. They establish a tight grip upon us and, by and large, shape our thinking and behavior throughout our lives (p. 79).

This research seeks to interrogate the features and narrative of that “grip,” and the first step is simply recognizing that there is a grip, and that the U.S. history curriculum is teaching

more than a chain of sequential events to young Americans. It delivers a story of the United States that is designed to foster enthusiasm for the American democratic experiment. The purpose of this research is to deconstruct the covert nature of this design, which is acknowledged by education scholars, such as hooks (2003), who wrote "...we have all been challenged as educators to examine the ways in which we support, whether consciously or subconsciously, existing structures of dominance. We have all been encouraged by democratic educators to become more aware" (p. 45). For example, the National Council for the Social Studies declared in their 2018 position statement on Indigenous People:

Therefore, if educators and teacher educators take no action to disrupt the existing curricular norms and the narrow understandings they communicate, ... education as a whole runs the risk of unintentionally continuing the antiquated and dangerous narrative of 'Kill the Indian, Save the Man' that centers assimilationist policies of the past (Shear et al., 2018, p.169).

Yet the narrative from the U.S. history high school history course has remained consistent. The content and historical developments still cultivate objective conclusions that America is a progressive, democratic nation-state, and the sacrifices of certain groups to achieve this success for other groups were inevitable and are therefore mostly acceptable.

The perspective of constructionism, the idea of culture and individuals creating understanding in tandem, and the space to interrogate those understandings, is aligned with a critical historical pedagogy. This research recognizes the reality of a persistent singular perspective in shaping the American nation-state and the singular way of knowing in building the patriotism and rhetoric used to bolster that nation-state. The constructionism perspective rejects this singular perspective and singular way of knowing, and instead embraces diverse ways of

understanding and diverse ways of knowing. This research seeks to find a place for that diversity in the construction of the high school U.S. history curriculum. While discussions of a diverse, culturally inclusive pedagogy have preceded this research for decades, from scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1998), Apple (2011) and hooks (2003), the recognition of hooks is still significant, “Yet many people supported inclusion only when diverse ways of knowing were taught as subordinate and inferior to the superior ways of knowing informed by Western metaphysical dualism and dominator culture” (p. 47). Western ways of knowing are still the framework for the American history curriculum through the permutation and emphasis on events. Delgado Bernal (2002) reported from Villenas and Deyhle (1999) that:

... the colonization of the mind is continued through the instilling of a historical amnesia that renders Latino/ Indigenous Peoples as “immigrants,” foreigners who have no claim to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge... of Latino ... communities are not validated, let alone taught (p. 112).

Banks and Banks (2010) emphasized that students are usually taught out of context knowledge which is abstract, as opposed to personalized and humanized knowledge (p. 12). This type of abstract knowledge in the classroom continues from 1776, where abstract application of Enlightenment principles permitted Thomas Jefferson to write about equality while claiming human beings as property. A less abstract and more human, personalized approach to understanding the formation of the United States in the late 18th century would highlight this contradiction and possibly reframe the foundation of the nation.

The U.S. history curriculum has been traditionally marketed as an objective narrative of American progress, expansion, and exceptionalism, with oppression being an inevitable but

justifiable casualty of the democracy (Symcox, 1999). Those who have been oppressed are forced to recognize this narrative, without the preface that it is, in fact, a subjective narrative, and to internalize all the dissonance that acceptance may generate under the heading of objective history. Apple (2011) called on educators to confront this dissonance and the modern power structures that continue to impact students' lives. He discussed globalization and the responsibility of all educators to unpack and teach about these systems that are frequently excluded when he wrote:

Class and gender relations, racializing dynamics and structures, political economy, discussions of empire and colonialism, and the connections between the state and civil society, for example, are sometimes hard to find or when they are found seem to be words that are not attached to any *detailed analysis* of how these dynamics actually work (p. 225). (Italic emphasis is mine).

Doll (2013) also called on educators to layer curriculum with multiple possibilities in search for the right amount of form (objective) with flexibility (subjective). This is not an exact science and the very process of permitting teachers and students the space to find the balance is dialogue producing and democratic. He wrote, “problematics, perturbations, possibilities... are what give a curriculum not only its richness but also its sense of being” (Doll, 2013, p. 216). The importance is not only in providing a wide array of evidence but also permitting students the space to generate their own conclusions about the evidence, rather than forcing a consensus. Students cannot feel they are impugning the truth but are determining their own interpretations based on diverse evidence and recognition of missing evidence (e.g., oral histories and storytelling from marginalized groups).

Traditionally, the attraction to purely objective knowledge in curriculum was widespread because it is easier to frame and measure. It prioritizes a Eurocentric way of understanding the

world. Doll (2013) described under the third of four curriculum suggestions, relations, that mastery learning assumes the universe is set, and therefore must be taught to a pre-set goal. Conversely, if we assume the universe is in process, the curriculum must evolve, and part of this evolution involves a reconceptualization of the term *rigor*. Doll defined traditional understandings of rigor in the modernist framework as logical, scientific, and mathematically precise. However, rigor can mean the transmission of ideas, the meaningful dialogue that does the transmitting, and the community resulting from that transmission, which is, as Doll (2013) wrote, what “Dewey thought a school should be” (p. 221). Again, finding the balance between diverse teaching material and interpretation of that material is crucial. All of this requires balance. Fixico (2003) wrote that for Indigenous People, “community extends beyond human relationships” (p. 7). Doll (2013) also wrote about humans needing to connect themselves to the ecosystem, which is difficult in American society because of modernity’s emphasis on individualism. Fixico (2003) explained that White Americans link linear learning to empiricism; they must see and prove to know. This is important because throughout this nation’s history the most oppressed people were often unable to “prove” their oppression because they could not read or write or publish, thus their struggles became invisible. Meanwhile the curriculum documents the U.S. “progression” through time: victory over the British, Civil War, industrial revolution, defeat of the Spanish, with most accounts recorded by the privileged literate. In that regard, chronology serves a purpose; it proves the success of the American democracy. But this success applies to some groups at the expense of others (as well as the natural environment), whose perspectives are not readily “proven” because they were unrecorded and undervalued. This is not unique to the United States. Dashu (2016) wrote, “All early medieval written sources were produced by male clergy, who insisted on filtering everything through a masculinizing interpretation romana” (p. 10).

Thus, this research explored and interrogated the U.S. history curriculum in detail, not just as a curriculum of content and chronological developments, but one responsible for building a national story that is important to the identity of the American nation-state, through the included content and excluded developments. Crotty (1998) connected the nature of critical work with constructionism when he wrote, “The critical tradition...is even more suspicious of the constructed meanings that culture bequests to us. It emphasizes that particular sets of meaning... exist to serve a hegemonic interest” (p. 59). This connects to the research because sets of meaning are purposeful and intended to be constructed in the survey American history course, as the course is inherently a nation building activity and while Dozono (2022) found that the “Hegelian ideal of the nation-state as the ultimate fulfillment of reason/freedom” (p. 8) is active in world history, I argue through this research that it is active in the U.S. history curriculum as well.

Multiple Perspectives Meet the Master Narrative

The concept of a hidden curriculum is connected to the schematic narrative template (SNT) which is explained by Wertsch (2008) as a narrative that persists over time and is strongly connected to a nation’s identity; it is resilient because its general nature allows multiple events to be shaped in its vision, even if members of the nation and recipients of that SNT are unaware of that shaping. Wertsch further described the event of the Bronze Soldier removal in the Eastern European government of Estonia to explain a schematic narrative template (SNT). The statue’s removal resulted in anger and violence from Russian soldiers and the Russian government, who organized a cyber-attack on Estonia to punish them for the removal. Estonians saw the Bronze Solider as a monument that represented Soviet oppression and was attracting radical Russian nationalists (some showing up to the statue with pictures of Stalin), and therefore elected to move the statue to a less central location. Russians view the statue as a representation of Russian

heroism during WWII and Russia's efforts to save Estonia from the Nazis. The more detailed story of the Bronze Soldier (which Wertsch explained in the article as a wooden statue that had been blown up in the 1940s) is largely unknown and was not a key factor in the reactions from either side. Rather he described schematic narrative templates as ways people remember the history and trajectory of their nation. They come from folklore, national holidays, the media, and they are abstract and not anchored in specific details. For Russia, one of their SNTs is being invaded and then defeating the invader (e.g., Napoleon, Hitler). Wertsch (2008) described the SNT of any nation as a hidden co-author, and "when information and specific developments contradict the schema, they are 'distorted, simplified, or ignored'" (p. 142). For Estonians, the soldier represented oppression during the Soviet occupation, but for Russians, it represented the success of Russia in defeating Hitler and ensuring Estonia's freedom. Wertsch (2008) called these two different "mnemonic communities" (p. 133), which are the cultural tools different groups use to piece together the past into a familiar format. If a specific historical development does not fit the SNT in its totality, it can be made to fit by the selection of events that are included and excluded in a nation's history. Interestingly in the global history curriculum of New York State, the emphasis on Russia's military victories is attributed to their physical size and cold winter weather, not the endurance and bravery of the Russian people. The merger of excluded content into the curriculum is complicated, as Renan (1882) argued that:

Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, throws light on the violent acts that have taken place at the origin of every political formation, even those that have been the most benevolent in their consequences. Unity is always brutally established (p. 3).

Brown and Au (2014) concur that cultural memory is powerful in shaping the historical narrative. For the United States, a multicultural nation-state, this raises several questions. How do Americans identify themselves in the story of the United States? Some people raised in immigrant communities will identify themselves with a dash, such as *Italian-American* or *Mexican-American*, and there is an identity to the blended cultural reference. Other Americans further removed from the culture and nation of their immigrant ancestors do not identify with a dash. The identity of someone without ties to another country and culture is linked entirely to the formation of the United States. A question is, to what extent is identity threatened when multiple perspectives interrogate that master narrative and even contradict the core values of that narrative? Thus, the inclusion of multiple perspectives into a master narrative is not without conflict and yet that should not deter educators but empower those in the field to prepare for rich dialogue around the formation and meaning of the United States, as well as the expanded capacity of students to assess and interpret a wide variety of developments on their own terms.

The U.S. history curriculum in New York State, despite explicitly stated goals of inclusivity still aligns to a dominant narrative and a sacred curriculum. Waters (2007) explained the concept of a sacred history when he wrote “The idealistic sacred story needs to be told first, this is the story a society wishes for itself that fills the citizens with awe and love for the shared philosophical principles” (p. 250). In the United States this sacred story involves heroes and a positive trajectory of events (Novick, 1988), that embraces egalitarian rhetoric from the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution. Apple (2019) also reported on the “tendency to lift impersonal institutions to high esteem” (p. 103) in the social studies curriculum. This is also true in the English Language Arts curriculum, where Khan et al. (2022) found that African American characters in elementary school stories are usually compliant and obedient, even in the

face of systemic oppression. In positioning this value-free story first with supposedly axiomatic truths, schools might be denying students the opportunity to confront the complex evolution and connections that are a part of the political identity of any nation-state. Children as young as elementary school students can understand controversial issues with multiple perspectives, rather than the traditional “expanding horizons” curriculum rooted in recapitulation theory, which believes European descended people are more evolutionarily advanced than others (Wade, 2002).

In many ways, the New York state high school curriculum also avoids the dissonance created by a culturally relevant pedagogy and generally subscribes to a sacred curriculum. Oppression in the U.S. curriculum that cannot be ignored is exceptionized (sometimes with euphemisms like *western expansion*) and others are excluded (such as the practice of coverture in the 1800s or redlining in the 1900s). The curriculum must of course more cleverly preserve the master narrative as students become older. As Apple (2019) stated, “There needs to be continuous and increasingly sophisticated justification...” (p. 86) to preserve the singular interpretation of the story of United States. One way of achieving that goal in the curriculum is through language. Lewison, Flint, and Sluys (2002) reported on the connection between language and domination in the curriculum. For example, this is demonstrated with phrases such as *western expansion* in the high school curriculum to describe land stolen from Indigenous People, as opposed to the term *settler colonialism*, which provides a sense of agency in the co-opting of Indigenous land (Brown University, 2021). Recognizing the perspective from *settler colonialism* is challenging in a traditional curriculum because it contradicts the schematic narrative template of the United States as democratic, free, and exceptional. In essence, to cite Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), author of *An Indigenous People’s History*, “The affirmation of democracy requires the denial of colonialism but denying it doesn’t make it go away” (p. 116). It does not go away and as a result it is the

responsibility of educators and curriculum developers to infuse these perspectives that deeply challenge the traditional narrative. Otherwise, students are left to reconcile these inconsistencies on their own in any number of instances, when they enroll in college courses, when they self-educate on excluded historical developments, or when they experience injustice for themselves as members of a marginalized group. Lewison, Flint, and Sluys (2002) described elementary school curriculum and teachers as “transmitters” (p. 383) of knowledge rather than disruptors. However, the high school curriculum is not deeply disruptive either, as it maintains the vocabulary and core principles that support the United States schematic narrative template of an exceptional democracy. Marshall and Gram (2022) reflected “Undergraduates [in college] often report frustration and even anger when they discover that the triumphalist narratives their teachers handed down as simple truths in K-12 are contested by historians” (p. 790).

Constructing Manifest Destiny and Deconstructing Collective Pronouns

This research is critical in nature because as Crotty (1998) stated, “Constructionism tends to foster it (the critical spirit)” (p. 58). Crotty (1998) referred to “sets of meaning” (p. 58) that enculturate us, and these meanings are constructed and delivered through the U.S. history curriculum. Bell et al. (2016) explained “Each of could be said to be embedded in a particular way of making sense of the world. Left unchallenged, this embeddedness leads us to take for granted our world view as given, natural, and true, as simply ‘the way things are’” (p. 73). The curriculum presents success for some as success for the general American community, and these meanings are taught as an objective, inevitable destiny, as denoted, for example, in the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” an all-encompassing term for U.S. federal policy that legalized the stealing of Indigenous land and the spreading of plantation slavery west of the Mississippi River. In discussing the 19th century, White population explosion and claiming of lands west of the

Mississippi, Immerwahr (2019) reported “The government gave up prosecuting squatters by the 1830s and instead let them buy their land. In the 1860s it began giving away parcels of public land as ‘homesteads’ to nearly any citizen willing to live on them” (p. 34). The co-opting of land from Indigenous People is still presented under the positive euphemism of *destiny* which suggests inevitable and justifiable actions that were required to build the American nation-state. Language matters and according to Cherryholmes (1988), speech is more than descriptive, it is action oriented. Linking to Freire (1993), a critical pedagogy is one where content with a partial view is rejected; a critical pedagogy, instead, “seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another” (p. 47). Teachers may or may not clarify the collective pronoun *we* in “We the people” from the Constitution was for White property-owning males (Bell et al., 2016). Regardless, the U.S. democratic experiment is praised for its “revolutionary language” and not for the totality of its actions. The hypocrisy of the language compared to the actions is not only ubiquitous and forgiven but the entire possibility of a democracy breeding on oppression is ignored because the enlightened intentions of the sacred words are prioritized.

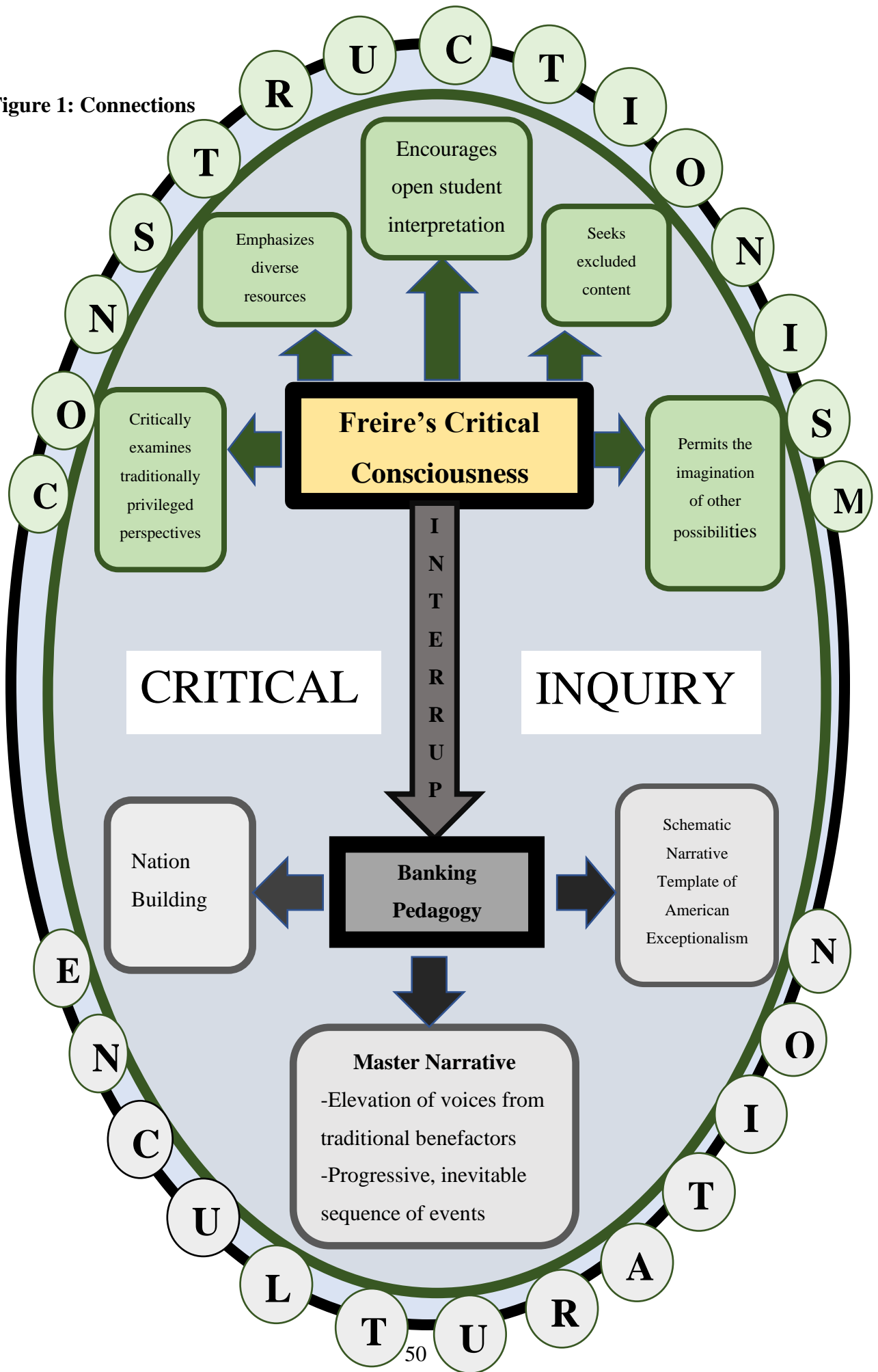
Theoretical Framework

The epistemological positioning of this research is from constructionism, a position grounded in the nexus of humans and their world, in the power of enculturation in how each person understands and makes sense of themselves and their world. The theoretical perspective is critical inquiry derived from Paulo Freire’s revolutionary work in Brazil, where he challenged peasants not only to read, but to reimagine their communities and to reject the inevitability of their present political and economics situations. To illuminate the importance of historical studies, Crotty (1998) described critical inquiry by writing “to ask who human beings are or what it means to be human is to ask what human beings have made of themselves” (p. 150). The

history of humanity is constructed and evolving and this research questions the collective reality that exudes from a history intent on nation building and nation bolstering. As Crotty (1998) wrote, we chunk realities and create systems to build an understandable whole, but “This process leads to a loss of many previous differences” (p. 133). Freire (1993) understood humans as fully emmeshed in a historical, human world and fully able to imagine other possibilities. This study invokes critical inquiry to understand how a master narrative may exist in a survey course. It connects deeply to critical inquiry because the sturdy master narrative, that wholistic trajectory of pre-determined conclusions, might stifle the imagination process for students who are formulating an understanding of their place in society.

Figure 1 below illustrates the connections between these frameworks:

Figure 1: Connections



There are additional intersecting sub-frameworks guiding this research. According to Maxwell (2013), bricolage is a research approach that accepts a combination of theories. Vanner (2015) defined bricolage as “leaning into the hybridity and cross- disciplinary of research perspectives...” (p. 2). Maxwell referred to critical realism as a philosophical position that combines ontological realism with epistemological constructivism. These combined approaches are essentially an embrace and melding of both an objective reality and a subjective interpretation. The example Maxwell (2013) used was global warming as an illustration of ontological realism: “to believe that global warming is a hoax will not stop the Earth from warming” (p. 43). This mixes with epistemological constructivism, where “what people believe is shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences as well as by the reality they interact with” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43). The research aligns with this approach because it recognizes objective historical situations such as the enslavement of approximately 4,000,000 African Americans in 1860 United States, or the Declaration of Independence as a document that rallied the 13 North American colonies against Great Britain in 1776. However, it also recognizes that these realities are broad representations of historical events, and all events were experienced differently at the time. Muhammad (2010) reminded his readers, “simple history lessons are often simple lies” (p. xiii), and in a culturally relevant curriculum, they would combine with detailed and diverse subjective experiences within those situations.

The varying and connected experiences matter in how educators design history lessons. For example, there are differing interpretations of Fourth of July celebrations, often considered the most patriotic of American holidays. One such interpretation differing from the dominant one was explained by Frederick Douglas in Rochester, New York. Douglas (1852) questioned the

meaning of this unifying national celebration for the millions of Americans that were crushed under the weight of one of the most oppressive slave societies in the world.

The various tenets in this study that support critical inquiry are:

- Critical consciousness as explained by Paulo Freire (1993).
- Individualism in U.S. mythology as explained Banks and Banks (2010).
- Culturally relevant pedagogy as explained by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) and expanded upon by others to include concepts of race hierarchy in America, such as Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011).
- The schematic narrative templates in the nation-state as explained by James Wertsch (2008).

Contextualizing the Master Narrative: Whose knowledge is “core”?

The work of legendary labor leader and activist Paulo Freire is one of the main theoretical frameworks for this research. Freire first outlined a vision for critical consciousness and distinguishing between theoretical explanations of objective and subjective epistemologies in his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1993) posited that the subjectivity and objectivity are in constant dialogue, “...one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized” (p. 24). For a simplified explanation, in a purely objective perspective we investigate the world without people, and in a purely subjective understanding, we would investigate people without the world (Freire, 1993). Therefore, the two must exist in tandem, people live in a world with hierarchies that oppress, and reward based on a variety of complicated factors, and the individual or group’s perception of their experiences in that structure are interwoven and always evolving. Freire (1993) stated that people can neither deny an objective reality because people do not simply survive, they exist in a

complicated present where the present is actually “more than a physical space, but also a historical space” (p. 72). Therefore, understanding the past and how the past shapes both an objective reality and subjective understandings and experiences in that reality for all people is imperative to a culturally relevant pedagogy. As humans, we are all products of the historical space Freire (1993) referenced, and this research examined how that space is formulated in the U.S. history curriculum. Said (1993) also linked past and present when he stated “...there is no just way in which past can be quarantined from present” (p. 4). Humans are intricately linked to and enmeshed in their social situations. In reflecting on the philosophy of John Dewey, Hansen and James (2016) wrote that “For Dewey, we human beings are already enmeshed in a social world... [and that] people can fall prey to that condition if they do not attend to and reflect upon the agencies ... of this influence” (p. 99). According to Freire (1993), “Human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation,” (p. 82). (Italic emphasis is mine). This concept is important to raise marginalized voices that have usually been excluded from sharing their experiences to social situations, to that social world, on the very public stage of national narratives in school curriculum. Equally important, it is critical that these voices are not situated outside the master narrative but are interwoven in the central narrative of the nation’s history. However, this is not easy because these perspectives are subject to opprobrium and can be considered, in relation to the core narrative of American exceptionalism, “unpatriotic” (Marx & Larson, 2012, p. 293). This response to new thinking and new voices as blasphemous is contradictory to the democratic classroom conceived by Dewey and described by Hansen and James (2016) which is, “not the carrying out of a blueprint... It is permanently vulnerable- or, better, invitational toward- the intrusion of new thinking” (p. 107). As Novick (1988) wrote, “...those raised on superpatriotic histories often think of more critical accounts as ‘anti-American’” (p. 13). However, the

subjective understandings and experiences of the oppressor groups have been presented as the objective reality of society, even in the evolving foci of state education departments and school boards around more culturally responsive choices (CRSE, 2019), the voices of the oppressed still orbit around and even interrogate the main narrative. Banks and Banks (2010) influenced the theory for this research as a framework for the intersection of culture, history, and curriculum. Banks and Banks (2010) succinctly summed up the relationship between “main narratives” and interrogative experiences when they wrote “Content, materials, and issues that are added to a curriculum as appendages instead of being integral parts of a unit of instruction can become problematic” (p. 241). The concept of new experiences as “problematic” is inherent to this research, which seeks to understand how an oppressed perspective problematizes the main narrative and therefore how the main narrative persists. Shear et al. (2015) explained Spivak’s (1994) interpretation:

The subaltern cannot speak because issues of masculine-Eurocentric representation assimilation lie within the popular discourse of freeing the Other to speak. She argued that to find voice within the hegemonic system, the subaltern must submit to the rules of dominant society and thus exist within a space of inferiority” (p. 75).

Therefore, including other voices is not as simple as including other voices. The inclusion in and of itself is a disruption, not merely an inclusion, and thus a radical departure from the main narrative’s purpose. And, practically speaking, literacy had been restricted for hundreds of years, so the voices students hear from, the primary sources they read, are often from the literate elite. One startling example of this is the prevalence of sundown towns across the United States. Loewen (2005) wrote about these jurisdictions that were created for Whites only, reporting that Illinois had over one hundred of them. Even though this is more recent history, with sundown

towns legally excluding Black Americans into the 1960s, their history is absent from the survey high school course in New York.

The literate elite enjoy the spotlight, they become the center of the curriculum, because their perspectives have been recorded, preserved, and codified into the national archives and therefore the national memory. This manifests in standardized exams, and the diverse, evolving environment that Dewey hoped for students to learn from is diminished by a “narrow accountability movement built around excessive standardized testing” (Hansen & James, 2016, p. 101). One specific standardized exam, the New York State U.S. History Regents, is tethered to the narrative generated by these primary sources.

Individualism

Related to this issue that certain knowledge is presented as foundational while other knowledge is extra, optional, and even interrogatory (Rodriguez, 1980), is that the oppressed, according to Freire (1993), are sometimes “convinced of their own unfitness” (p. 37). Bell (2016) wrote “people learn and incorporate oppressive stereotypes and beliefs reflected in larger society” (p. 11) and Martinez (2009) specifically studied the impact of color-blind racism on Chicano students through their essay writing in a first-year college English course. The research from Martinez (2009) discovered that these students frequently blame themselves and their ancestors “for not setting their standards high enough... and assuming that all members of this racial group [Mexican Americans] do not make the effort needed for the American dream” (p. 592). Martinez (2009) blamed the manipulation of abstract liberalism for sustaining white supremacy and convincing minority groups that poverty is a result of personal failure to succeed in a fair system. Loewen (2007), in reporting how students understand poverty, wrote “The students blame the poor for not being successful. They have no understanding of the ways that

opportunity is not equal in America and no notion that social structure pushes people around” (p. 205). Banks and Banks (2010) concurred that “Individualism as an ideal is extreme in the U.S. core culture [and is presented as] morally good” (p. 9) and reported that individualism is a myth because research shows where an individual is from is a strong factor in determining their future. Individualism also divorces humans from the environment, which is the antithesis of many North American Indigenous ideologies (Doll, 2013). In the 21st century, researchers are understanding how to expand students’ connections to place and community, beyond the exclusive and competitive human commodification of the land (Gruenwald, 2003). Continuing to embrace individualism as a core theme in a United States history class ensures meritocracy sustains its hold on success as a failure of individuals versus a failure of systems, or even a recognition that these oppressive systems exist. Eric Ward is an African American civil rights leader and expert on hate violence and inclusive democracy. Ward (2022) reported on the intersection of his experiences with racism when he moved from California to a new town in Oregon, with his previous understanding of power and freedom in the United States, in a 2022 issue of *American Educator*. Ward stated his beliefs “were directly challenged by the contradictions of the national morals with which I’d been raised and socialized... You have to pull yourself up by your bootstraps, the world is what you make of it” (p. 6). Ward was surprised by the discovery of systemic racism; these were not individual encounters of bad luck but rather “a set of patterns that have played out historically in the United States” (p. 7). The emergence of these patterns is largely unsettling, as Ward (2022) and Martinez (2009) described, because they are inherently contradictory to the morals the United States curriculum emphasizes as core to the U.S. national identity, such as democracy, inclusivity, meritocracy, and fairness.

Banks and Banks (2010) connected individualism to the Protestant work ethic embedded in U.S. history curriculum. This emphasis on the labor of Protestant people in the United States history curriculum ignores systemic oppression both within and outside of Protestantism, as well as the Protestant colonization of North America that this ethic is founded upon, particularly on the Eastern coast in the current United States. Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) brilliantly linked the 16th century enclosure movement in England with the torrent of “land hungry settlers enticed to cross an ocean with promises of land” (p. 36). Once in North America, the Protestant work ethic was contingent upon displacement. The standard U.S. history curriculum includes content related to Indigenous displacement, usually mentioned in relation to Andrew Jackson and the Indian Removal Act. It also includes information about the Protestant work ethic and Protestant values, particularly their impact on temperance and the public-school movement. However, the curriculum rarely connects these concepts and almost never presents the possibility that the latter was contingent on the former.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced ideas about culturally relevant pedagogy to mainstream education theory and argued that a student’s cultural background was important for their education, that it must be recognized, and that the education system needs to “maintain some cultural integrity as well as academic excellence” (p. 160). Her research is significant because it recognized multiple cultures as valuable to the American education system, and therefore, rejected the notion that Protestant White middle class values which have shaped the dominant narrative are the premier and only goal for all American students and teachers. This research builds off Ladson-Billings (1995) because it attempts to understand how the values of

the dominant narrative have been and continue to be delivered through the story of America's past in the United States history curriculum.

Schematic Narrative Templates

Werstch (2008) framework on the schematic narrative template situate the role of American exceptionalism in the interpretation of America's past through the curriculum. This framework explains a process of identification of core values in a nation that persists over time (Werstch, 2008). In the United States, historical developments in the curriculum are shaped to fit the expectation of progressive democracy. Any breach of that value, any attempt to disrupt the exceptional label, is viewed with suspicion.

This research is an intersection of these theories because it seeks to understand the tension between them. It investigated how the permutation of selected events served as pillars of the master narrative in both the New York State history curriculum and the standardized exams that students must pass in order to graduate. These theories shaped the research because the proposal here is that the U.S. history curriculum is more than a collection of content, facts, names, and events and that standardized exams might tell a story of how American democracy benefitted the majority. This is a story that covertly conceals oppression to preserve a reputation of justice and equality for most, a reputation that was cultivated beginning with European colonialism of Indigenous People's land in the 1600s, a reputation that was legalized during the American Revolution in July of 1776 (a revolution that continued racial, chattel slavery, Indigenous genocide, and coverture), and a reputation that was memorialized in history curriculum in the 18th century. This research explored how this narrative continued into the 21st century through New York State standardized exams, despite efforts to decolonize the curriculum and infuse more culturally responsive practices.

Historical Curriculum

Curriculum Choices

In his chapter on democracy and history, John Dewey wrote “to ‘learn history’ is to gain the power to recognize human connections” (Dewey, 1944). Hansen (2010) further explained “Dewey emphasized learning from *all* encounters in life, not just those that are familiar or confirming. This ‘interest’ is moral, in his view, because it concretizes and thereby sustains the very possibility of meaningful contact across and within differences” (p. 16). An important step in realizing Dewey’s vision is recognizing that not all encounters have been equally available to students. The focus of this section is on which human connections and encounters have specifically been emphasized and included in traditional U.S. history curriculum, and further, to understand the motivations for choices made. As Parker and Lo (2016) wrote in their article on the curriculum in the College Board’s Advanced Placement U.S. Government course, “Content is not chosen independently of institutional realities, of intellectual fashions, of customs and law...” (p. 203).

19th Century Representations

The goal of public education in fostering patriotic American values is well documented. Dating back to the 19th century, both public education and popular media contributed to a public consciousness centered around American exceptionalism. Public education has been associated with patriotism and citizenship construction from its inception (Barrow, 2017) and in the 19th century public education became more popular and more critical in forming the national American identity. As uniformity of school resources expanded, so did the messages of “us versus them” in available curriculum resources. Gursel (2018) researched the two most popular 19th century geography textbooks with millions in sales and found consistent praise for the

United States and Western Europe's technological achievements that triumphed over nature. In these same books, Gursel shared that Asia, Africa, and South America were portrayed as wild and untamed lands with the local people succumbing to the forces of nature. Images zoomed in with clarity on European Americans while people from other continents were portrayed as fuzzy and indistinguishable in the background. These textbooks showed Indigenous people burning colony villages while European settlers were portrayed simultaneously as victims and heroes triumphing over their savagery (Gursel, 2018). Nearly one hundred years later in the mid-20th century, Zimmerman (2004) reported that American geography textbooks praised European colonization efforts for "saving" Africa (p. 53) with a popular American history textbook calling enslaved people "happy" (p. 56). These messages of *othered* people and superior western civilization were also delivered through popular media, a continuing education of American exceptionalism for adults.

Dime novels, which were cheap paper periodicals, depicted images of Native Americans as violent, uncontrollable savages in the late 1800s and early 1900s (South Dakota Public Broadcasting, 2006). These images suggested that the defeat of Indigenous People was a moral obligation within the boundaries of the United States. In understanding group comparisons, Applebaum (2003) wrote "one group always being considered 'normal' and delineating what is 'other' or 'deviant' has consequences" (p. 159). Indigenous People were othered by the consistent theme of savagery in novels and textbooks, and that construction of Indigenous (in)humanity has lasted into the 21st century, where Indigenous People are still fighting to have their basic needs and democratic rights systematically recognized.

The superiority of the United States, and duty to civilize beyond the borders was popularized in late 19th century political cartoons in widely available periodicals. The

Philadelphia Inquirer, *Puck*, and *The Detroit News* among others depicted the United States as a benevolent and progressive giant struggling to civilize inferior people (drawn as smaller and distorted figures) in the lands of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico (Martinez-Fernandez, 1998). Smith (1999) stated “Colonized people have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it means to be considered not fully human, to be savage” (p. 28). The racism perpetuated from these images would be viewed as blatant and offensive today, but hundreds of years ago they served to strengthen the foundation for a nation formulated around white supremacy.

National Social Studies Standards in the late 20th Century

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the teachings of white supremacy and American exceptionalism became less blatant. The motivation to preserve the master narrative was still powerful though, as illustrated by attempts to restructure the curriculum. Symcox (1999) researched the 1994 National Standards for History, a project she had been involved in for years, with the goal being to revamp and bolster history education and address the supposed academic mediocrity reported in the 1983 government publication *A Nation at Risk*. Although the project originally had bipartisan political support, that support deteriorated close to the publication date and the U.S. Senate ultimately voted to censure the history standards in 1995. Symcox (1999) reported that the standards were the result of years of consensus and widespread input from college professors and K-12 social studies teachers to educational philosophers and policy makers. In the end the standards reflected the position from social historians, which advocated for multiple perspectives over a hero history. Hero historians focus turning points on individuals and higher institutions. For example, research from Cole et al. (2011) on union victories during the 1930s found Franklin D. Roosevelt received most of the credit for New Deal labor

legislation, and not the “diligent, nationwide, grassroots mobilization of America workers and their unions” (p. 7).

Nonetheless, the National Standards for History failed to pass because the “original consensus was dismantled in 1994/5 by conservative politicians and the press, who preferred the traditional historical narrative of a unified past to the pluralism inherent in the new social history” (p. 7). Lynne Cheney, who had been involved with the project from its inception, wrote a scathing critique of the near published standards in the *Wall Street Journal* (Cheney, 1994). Cheney (1994) questioned the multiple inclusions of Harriet Tubman and the proposed activity for students to consider the forging of the United States from an Indigenous Person’s perspective. The momentum to preserve the master narrative was powerful. As this debate was raging in 1994 among proponents and critics of the National Standards History Project, Gloria Ladson-Billings was formulating her article on culturally relevant pedagogy. Critical race theory, which emerged in the 1970s, sought to understand the continued role of race in the formation and evolution of the United States throughout the post-World War II years, and Ladson-Billings (1998) explicitly connected critical race theory to education. As Symcox (1999) chronicled, attempts to push back against the maintenance of white supremacy in the curriculum were highly publicized and ultimately eliminated. The Senate had capitulated in unanimity and the arguments from conservative positions to preserve a sacred curriculum in K-12 social studies were victorious.

Critical Race Theory and Civil Rights

Critical race theory as applied to education is explained by Brayboy (2006) when he wrote “...racism has become so deeply ingrained in a society’s and schooling’s consciousness that it is often invisible” (p. 428). However, integration victories are quite visible in the

curriculum, as illustrated by the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision in 1954, which is a pillar in survey U.S. history courses. Some think white supremacy is long erased from public schools because of their high school lessons on *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2010). What is mostly invisible in the curriculum are the efforts after 1954 to suppress integration and Black African American children from attending quality schools, including the Regan administration's commitment to maintaining segregation and white supremacy. For example, during the 1980's the Department of Justice refused to desegregate a school district that had fought Brown since 1956 (Anderson, 2018). Darling-Hammond (2010) reported that, due to the failure to fund federal desegregation policies in the 1980s, "America stood at the gateway to the 21st century almost exactly where it stood 30 years earlier- having lost in a giant tug-of-war much of the ground it gained during the 1970s" (p. 35). The success of the *Brown* decision in desegregating schools was far from linear in the decades following 1954, yet this Supreme Court case has taken on an almost mythical place in the survey U.S. history courses and, by extension, among the general American public.

Hero Selection in the Master Narrative

Leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States are featured as central figures in the history curriculum. Dr. Martin Luther King was eventually incorporated into curriculum as an African American hero who sacrificed his own comfort and security to achieve the ideals enshrined in the Constitution (Waters, 2007). This strategy of crowning Dr. King a civil rights hero supports Freire's (1993) accusation that "oppressors favor... promoting selected leaders" (p. 116). Dr. King is rarely presented as a dynamic figure who was questioning his own messages shortly before he was murdered. In an *On Being* (2018) interview, Muslim activist Rami Nashashibi stated that King was "...problematizing his *I Have a Dream* speech before he died,"

(Tippett, 2018, 10:30) because he realized Black Americans were oppressed beyond visible segregation in schools and water fountains. Dr. King understood that covert discrimination and deep systemic injustice must be confronted. In the same interview community organizer Lucas Johnson stated that Dr. King was questioning the “edifice that produced beggars” (Tippett, 2018, 10:30). Dr. King’s thoughts expressed in this interview were aligned with Freire’s (1993) theory that, “The concrete situation which begets oppression must be transformed” (p. 24). His general support for labor unions is also rarely given attention in high school history textbooks (Cole et al., 2011). Dr. King was deeply concerned with economic injustice in the late 1960s, an issue that was reported on by the Kerner Commission (George, 2018) and subsequently ignored by the Johnson administration. In the U.S. history curriculum, President Johnson signing the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts are celebrated staples of any civil rights unit, but the findings of the Kerner Commission, that White racism caused inner city violence, are excluded.

Democracy, White Supremacy, and Capitalism

The curriculum generally maintains the hidden tenets of a nation built on a mix of white supremacist and capitalist values. Ladson-Billings (1998) stated that “The salience of property often is missed in our understanding of the U.S.A. as a nation. Blended with democracy, capitalism slides into the background of our understanding of the way in which the U.S. political and economic ideology are entangled and read as synonymous” (p. 15). Furthermore Taylor (2009) wrote that in the capitalist economic structure, “property in its numerous forms is the foundation upon which poverty rests” (p. 1). Adams and Zuniga (2016) concurred, “The democratic myth that every child can grow up to be President has been conflated with the capitalist myth that every child can become rich through hard work” (p. 215). The preservation of democratic and capitalist ideas as mutually dependent is woven throughout the curriculum.

Gay (2002) also recognized that “ignoring poverty” (p. 108) is typical in the curriculum. A historical example of this connection between democracy and capitalism is explained in detail by Blaakman (2020) who researched the prevalence of land speculation in the 1780s and 1790s after the 1783 Treaty of Paris doubled the size of the United States. The competition to steal land from Indigenous People while pitting state and federal governments against each other significantly shaped the Constitutional principle of federalism. Federalism is normally presented in democratic terms to a class of high school U.S. history students as a way for federal and state governments to share power, with all the positive connotations the word *share* and *democracy* imply. However, the manifestation of that division is more complicated and nuanced. Blaakman (2020) wrote “Pitting revenue hungry governments against each other, speculators twisted federalism into a basis for market competition that promised to serve private interests” (p. 586), and then continued, “For speculators on the ground, federalism was a set of legal, political, and financial resources for acquiring claims to Indigenous land and attempting to make those investments profitable” (p. 587). The entanglement of property and individual rights was critical to the formation of the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998), as was Whiteness, as Taylor (2009) wrote... “whiteness constitutes property” (p. 4). Yet those developments, along with co-opted lands from Indigenous People, are absent from a survey U.S. history curriculum. In addition, in the 20th century during the Great Depression, property became an accessible commodity of non-wealthy Americans through the 30-year mortgage, however exclusionary policies prevented nonwhites from participating in those economic advantages, and this practice known as redlining is mostly ignored in the New Deal units of survey U.S. history courses.

In the 21st century, New York state educators are encouraged to teach about multiple perspectives. Barrow (2017) reported that the National Council of Social Studies recognized the

evolving globalized world and the responsibility of social studies teachers to include global citizenship and multiple perspectives when she stated, “Without multiple perspective and critical conversations, a cycle of fear and hatred based on ignorance and misunderstanding may be perpetuated” (p. 164). For this transition to culturally relevant pedagogy to be successful, historians and educators must acknowledge the less blatant but still powerful undercurrents of American exceptionalism in the curriculum as it continues in all facets. Chavez-Moreno (2021) revealed that the master-narrative of white supremacy, American exceptionalism, and imperialism are usually presented as common sense, therefore denying students (and teachers) the chance to confront and challenge these developments.

Smith (1999) described these master narratives as broader historical generalizations that erase the experiences of marginalized groups. Smith (1999) stated some of the problems around Western history are the ideas that “history can be told in one coherent narrative...that we assemble all the facts in an ordered way so that they tell us the truth. The idea that history as a discipline is innocent. In theory it means historians can write a true history of the world” (p. 32). But where are these historians from and who is their audience? In speaking about Indigenous ways of knowing, Fixico (2013) wrote that “The linear mind looks for cause and effect, and the Indian mind seeks to comprehend relationships” (p. 8). If educators continue with this singular way of constructing the story of our nation’s past, any alternatives to that system will be branded as divergent at best and possibly blasphemous or treasonous.

State and National Curriculum in the 21st Century

An impetus to create a more culturally relevant education resulted in institutions like state education departments confronting and challenging these generalizations. The College Board revamped the curriculum and exams of its core history courses in the last ten years. The focus

shifted towards sourcing of documents and examining multiple perspectives (College Board, 2019). The trend has trickled down from Advanced Placement courses to U.S. history and global history courses in New York State, because teachers are now encouraged to emphasize areas outside of Europe and teach skills required to contextualize primary-source documents. The change demonstrated a shift to a more analytical approach towards historical documents, requiring students to consider an author's point of view or the audience. This is reflected in the revamped New York State U.S. History and Global History Regents exams (NYSED, 2022).

It appears, based on a plethora of rhetoric around the movement towards culturally responsive education and a shift towards a more analytically focused curriculum and exam structure, that New York State is moving towards a more culturally responsive and sustaining history curriculum for high school students.

There are two concerns with the above developments from the last ten years. One is that despite the inclusion of historical skills and document analysis, the focus away from a Euro-centric curriculum, and the creation of the CRSE (2019) framework, the survey American history course still aligns itself with a narrative that supports American progress and exceptionalism. Two is that the persistence of these narratives is even more dangerous because they are cloaked in a package that purports a culturally responsive American history. When examined at a nuanced level, the content, vocabulary choices, and sequence of events in the U.S. history survey course indicate the curriculum is still orbiting around a Eurocentric narrative that values progress and individualism for some at the expense of others (Shear et al., 2015). The content that supports this perspective is prioritized over the inclusion and reconciliation of formerly excluded developments, developments that might support another interpretation, one where the foundation

of the nation rests partially on exploited and oppressed groups to achieve the goals of nation building and white supremacy.

Forging the United States: Interpretations of the 17th Century Framework

The original curriculum narrative centers the conversation around the claim of equal opportunity, which is a core principle in the American democratic experiment. One important example is from Thomas Jefferson, who positioned himself as an Enlightenment thinker when he wrote that all people are created equally in the Declaration of Independence. This claim is foundational in the conception of the United States and the patriotism sustained through survey history courses in American public schools. Jefferson's profits as a slave owning plantation master in Virginia are well known as is the hypocrisy of the words he penned in 1776, because they clashed with the realities of his profit from exploitation. However, consciously, or subconsciously this hypocritical framework the nation sits upon is still exceptionized. After airing the contradictions, the conclusion (or forced consensus) is usually that Jefferson was acting within the norms of his time, that he created a path for equality that would eventually include others (e.g., enslaved African Americans, women, landless Whites), that his ideology alone was radical enough for the 18th century, and that his words inspired countless folks around the world, regardless of the realities of his situation in Virginia. Cherryholmes' (1988) observed that the rhetorical claims of the Founding Fathers exceed the logic that slavery is in fact compatible with a nation founded on principles of moral rectitude and human rights. Apple (2019) explained this desire to build consensus in the curriculum, to present a seemingly objective consensus, serves a purpose, which is to ensure that students "see no other serious possibility to the economic and cultural assemblage now extant" (p. 6). After quoting the core principles of the Declaration of Independence about truth and unalienable rights, Novick (1988)

wrote, “Rarely have so many ambiguous terms and dubious propositions been compressed into such a brief passage” (p. 7).

The problem with the typical conclusion about Jefferson’s iconic work sowing the seeds of a moral and enlightened nation is not in the conclusion itself, but rather in how it is presented, *which is as a foregone conclusion, and as the only conclusion*. A different conclusion is that in claiming humans as property, enslaving them, and profiting off their humanity, Jefferson excluded them from enlightenment principles and redefined what it meant to be both human and equal. The number of enslaved people actually increased after the United States congealed as a nation- state around concepts of universal liberty and equality. This alternative conclusion is more radical, not in its interpretation of the events but in the extent to which it disrupts the master narrative of an exceptional United States built on Enlightenment ideology, progress, and democracy. Alexander (2020) stated, “There was no contradiction in the bold claim made by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that ‘all men are created equal’ if Africans were not really people” (p. 33). Harris (1993) concurred that African Americans had to be perceived as different. Still the U.S. history curriculum presents liberty as inorganic, as a one-dimensional benefit of the 1776 revolution, because, as Taylor (2009) explained, “The founding fathers battle cry of freedom, albeit, for powerful, propertied white men of the time, is legendary in American mythology” (p. 3).

Banks and Banks (2010) stated that when discussing the “‘all men are created equal’ clause, one should remember to distinguish between a nation’s ideals and its actual practices” (p. 9). However, is the very act of “distinguishing” between the ideals and practices a problem in and of itself, because distinguishing both masks and absolves Jefferson from redefining equality and justifying oppression? How can a teacher permit this alternative conclusion and still be a

Jefferson apologist? Banks and Banks (2010) explained how social studies content is presented to maintain the master narrative, but they do not recognize the tensions and outcomes that might occur when these competing narratives collide in a classroom. Can both narratives, one that condemns Jefferson and one that exceptionizes him, both be perceived as acceptable or even patriotic? Or, using themes from literature, is one bound to be the protagonist narrative and the other antagonist? Doll (2002) redefined rigor as creating space for dialogue, “for different alternatives, relations, connections” (p. 221), but also recognized that educators must be aware of hidden assumptions that may frame this dialogue. One obstacle to this dialogue and these connections is the chronological permutation of the course. When the recognition of racism and oppression is in fact linked to the rhetoric in the founding documents, it is included within the specific context of a unit far from early America in the chronological permutation, such as the “Causes of the Civil War” unit which would include the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Therefore, it cannot serve as a lens to see the oppressive intentions from the 18th century. In the popular Lincoln-Douglas debates for an Illinois Senate seat, Douglas (1858) preached that “I believe this government was...made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever.” Nearly forty years later in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Chief Justice Taney clarified in plain English the intentions of the rhetoric in the founding documents, stating that the principles and rights spelled out in the Declaration of Independence were never intended to include nonwhites. This is derived from his majority opinion enshrining separate but equal into law when he wrote that the “African race” ... was “not intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896). However, teaching U.S. history chronologically prevents students from making these connections. By the time students reach the “Reconstruction” unit, the Enlightenment foundation of the United States was already “settled”

over a hundred years ago, which in school time equates to three to four months ago in a September “Foundations” unit.

Freire (1993) and Marshall and Gram (2022) suggested that educators should not think for their students, should not transform the “organic into the inorganic, life into death” (Freire, 1993, p.81). And yet more recently, in his documentation of the now famous Carr Community Academy fifth graders, Brian Schultz (2018) stated that he yielded decision making to his students (p. 85). These students captured the attention of the nation, including a presidential candidate in their sophisticated documentation of their deteriorating school conditions. Yet their teacher who memorialized their journey declared that he was “attempting dangerous teaching by relinquishing it [the power to decide]” (Schultz, 2018, p. 85). The idea of empowering students to decide, to interpret, and to think, is still perceived as a pedagogy outside of the normal or acceptable student-teacher relationship and, as an extension, of minor-authority relationship.

Freire (1993) continued to explain that revolution generates from a unified praxis. In teaching late 18th century U.S. history, the unity of the 13 colonies in successfully overthrowing the British is the emphasized narrative, even as the division between social classes, between those who oppressed and those who were oppressed, increased, and sharpened. Banks and Banks (2010) highlighted contradictions of late 18th and early 19th century American history figures in the modern elementary classroom. When a teacher hangs “a picture of Frederick Douglas, the African American abolitionist, on the wall next to a picture of George Washington, a White slaveholder” (p. 49) the resulting contradictions are “confusing and alienating for students” (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 49).

The dissonance Banks and Banks (2010) referenced is unrelated to Frederick Douglas, who dedicated his life to opposing the injustices of slavery. The hypocrisy stems directly from

Washington, the first president whose slave ownership has been exceptionized to preserve a narrative about the birth of a democratic United States. Zinn (1980) bluntly reminded us that, “George Washington was the richest man in America” (p. 85), and a slave owner. But if teachers directly confront this perception or provide their students space to confront it, they risk tarnishing the reputation of a man recognized as a key Founding Father, war general, Federalist, and first president, a recognizable hero since his picture decorated schoolhouses nationwide after the U.S. victory of the British in the War of 1812. Simply put, dialogue that questions the character of Washington also shakes the bedrock of the nation.

A Nation Born in Genocide

Similarly, the march of European descended settlers to the American West is packaged as “inevitable” by the persistent use of the terminology like *Westward Expansion* and *Manifest Destiny*. Alexander (2020) reported on the connection between White European desire for land and the increased presentation of Indigenous People as savages, which conveniently aligns with the justification for expansion onto Indigenous People’s land. “As sociologists Keith Kilty and Eric Swank have observed, eliminating “savage” is less of a moral problem than eliminating human beings, and therefore American Indians came to be understood as a lesser race-uncivilized savages- thus providing for the extermination of native people” (Alexander, 2020, p. 29). Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) quoted Dr. King while interrogating the terminology *Manifest Destiny* used to conceal the genocidal tendencies embedded in federal policies of the early United States:

Our nation was born in genocide... We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its Indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted

ourselves to reject or even feel remorse for this shameful episode-Martin Luther King (p. 78).

Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) is a premier scholar on the history of Indigenous People and advocates for the phrase *settler-colonialism*. This term implies a sense of agency in the settlement and co-opting of Indigenous land (Shibusawa, 2021), and its infusion into the curriculum is a way for high school students to consider another perspective in the American narrative of political expansion. This distinction matters because speech is a critical way that power is reproduced (Applebaum, 2003).

When reviewing social studies standards across all fifty states, Shear et al. (2015) found that standards around Indigenous People were lacking in both quantity and quality. Indigenous People's standards drastically diminish after the year 1900, implying that "Indigenous People disappear" (Shear et al., 2015, p. 82) and the narrative from the standards that are included tell a story of Indigenous People that are combative outsiders doomed to relinquish control of North America to civilized European settlers. In describing the identity of social groups through comparisons between them, Applebaum (2003) described the idea of an "implicit norm of reference that is so powerful and well established, indeed the norm appears natural and can be taken for granted" (p. 158). The actions of the Europeans settlers across North America have been normalized in the curriculum through included events and crafted vocabulary, and therefore the actions and reactions of people who have traditionally inhabited the land thousands of years before the invaders, have been stigmatized in comparison.

The belief of American exceptionalism is both perpetuated and concealed through the collective *we* and *us*. A final recent example of this is specifically from Whitson (2009) who evaluated the criticisms of the legendary text *A People's History of the United States* by Howard

Zinn (1999). Critics accused Zinn (1999) of simply reshuffling heroes and villains as he claimed no progress in the American democratic experiment had been made. Whitson (2009) rejected this simplistic synthesis and instead dug deeper into the true contentions with Zinn's (1999) work, primarily from Lynne Cheney. Whitson (2009) concluded that Zinn (1999) was neither making the case for or against progress, nor for or against individuals; rather *he was including voices that have been excluded*. Whitson (2009) quoted Zinn "'How can the judgement be made if the benefits and losses (from industrialization or other historical developments) cannot be balanced because the losses are either *unmentioned or mentioned quickly?*'" (p. 19). (Italic emphasis is mine.) The unmentioned content is the excluded content in the U.S. history curriculum. When invoking the collective *we*, as in "we benefitted" or "we made progress" or "we corrected our wrongs," U.S. history classes erase the varied experiences of different groups related to certain historical developments. When it becomes convenient to exclude content that sabotages the master narrative, we are left with one voice shouting over and drowning out the multiple perspectives, the unmentioned voices, and experiences. Furthermore, the more pervasive oppressive practices against certain groups are, "the more difficult it is to see how they have been constructed in the first place" (Bell, 2016, p. 6). Being that oppression against certain groups is in fact pervasive and institutionalized in the United States, it is critical for educators to identify how the master narrative lives in the current curriculum.

Culture and Curriculum

If "teaching is always teaching about something" (Ball & Forzani, 2011, p. 38), the question is, what is that "something" in the story of the United States? Ball and Forzani (2011) cited inadequately prepared history teachers for presenting out of context dates and names, while robbing students of the investigatory component of historical research. Embedded in the

emphasis on investigation is a larger question. To what extent are educators willing to permit student investigations that result in diverse conclusions, including conclusions that might interrogate the master narrative of the United States as a democratic and exceptional nation-state? Pre-service history teachers are not commonly taught about the narrative building trajectory of the course, and how the included facts, language, euphemisms, events, chronology, and pillars of American expansion support a master narrative of an exceptional America. This narrative is covertly determined because it is presented as an objective fact and a decided reality.

Deficit Cultures

The master narrative has been vulnerable to criticism in the last few decades. Connections between culture and history curriculum have become more interconnected since the late 20th century research of Gloria Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings (1995) attempted to embed an understanding into American education that different cultures do not imply deficit cultures. The idea of deficit cultures is linked to deficit races, and the racial hierarchy and scientific justification of that hierarchy in the United States is important to this conceptualization. Taylor (2009) described the famous taxonomer Carlos Linnaeus (a figure students are likely to encounter in their biology courses), as “one of the first to classify humans on the basis of the socio-political construction of race....us[ing] skin color to divide people into White, Black, Red, and Yellow” (p. 4). The eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is a key indicator of how influential these divisions were in valuing and devaluing certain races, of humanizing and dehumanizing American citizens, immigrants, and Indigenous People. Daniel Okrent (2019) in his comprehensive work on eugenics in the United States, *The Guarded Gate*, explained the racial hygienics movement as one that ranked all races in the United States as inferior to the Anglo-Saxon. From Benjamin Franklin to Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Cabot

Lodge, top American policy makers were more than concerned about potential “harm” from African Americans and non-Aryan, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants to the United States (Okrent, 2019). Okrent noted the widespread influence of the American eugenics’ movement and the deeply embedded belief of Anglo-Saxon superiority in state department reports calling non-Anglo-Saxons, “filthy, un-American, inferior, ignorant, verminous” (p. 282). The global influence of American racism is also well documented in Nazi literature, the “official Nazi *Handbook for Law and Legislation* would specifically cite American immigration law as a model for Germany” (Okrent, 2019, p. 361). Sanchez (2021) also reported on the “hierarchy of desirability” (p. 264) that excluded nonwhites from naturalized citizenship around the time of the Quota Acts of the early 1920s. Apple (2019) connected this movement to school curriculum when he wrote “Science became the rhetorical, though often unconscious cloak to cover conservative social and educational decisions” (p. 75). This topic is brushed over in the curriculum with the Quota Acts of the early 1920’s typically included to demonstrate the upsurge in nativist sentiment after the Industrial Revolution and again after World War I, while eugenics and the underlying race science philosophy at the turn of the 20th century is excluded. Even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, Zimmerman (2004) reported that history textbooks in Georgia blamed economic differences on racially inherited characteristics.

Notions of white supremacy are prevalent in the relationships between a White legislated government and nonwhite compliance or disobedience. Regarding immigration, Sanchez (2021) shared a unifying quote around which Texas lawmakers perceived nonwhites. During the Great Depression, Congressman John C. Box referred to Mexicans as “the ‘low-grade Spaniard, peonized Indian, and negro slave mixe[d] with negroes, mulattoes, and other mongrels and some sorry whites’” (p. 265). This attitude that people from Mexico are inferior continued from the

Mexican American War, which is always connected to the concept of Manifest Destiny in the curriculum and ultimately taught as the successful piece to America's Manifest Destiny puzzle. In 1915, racism from the chair of the New York State Committee was evident when he stated that the failure of Indigenous People to thrive was because of their cultural isolation from Whites while on their reservations (Clements, 2021, p. 296). Clements (2021) reported in his research on Indigenous People in New York state that racism and Prohibition intersected to target nonwhite communities and invade reservations (p. 307). In traditional U.S. history curriculum, Prohibition is taught as a failure of the U.S. government because it was difficult to legislate morality; it is usually not taught as a weapon against vulnerable and oppressed minority communities. Clements reported that "Prohibition paved the way for cultural tropes and racialized myths regarding Native savagery and criminality to suddenly appear real, manifest, and enforceable" (p. 307). In fact, he later reflected largely on the central focus of this study, which is an untold history that includes systemic effort to "tie race to criminality in a familiar but still largely untold story in the 20th century United States" (Clements, 2021, p. 319).

Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) expanded on Ladson-Billing's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) when they explained that racism has in fact deemed different cultures as deficit. The explicit inclusion of racism is important because the term *culture* absorbs race and is too broad of a term that conceals other social phenomena (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Brown-Jeffy and Cooper pointed out that "culturally relevant pedagogy does not explicitly problematize race" (p. 70), but that it should, and that CRP also needs to reject "colorblindness and race neutral policies" (p.70). The history of race-blind policies is consequential as well. The reason color blind policies became acceptable was because racism has always been simultaneously overt and covert in American society. African Americans were enslaved before and after the American

Revolutionary War, yet race was not mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. The institution of slavery was at first economic focused, but then as abolitionist movements grew it was defended as a *peculiar institution* with biblical justifications and moral overtones of acceptable racial hierarchy. In post-Civil War America, racial-blind policies deny the existence of racism and racial hierarchy that have persisted since 1865, despite the victory of the Union during the Civil War and passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. After all these legal victories, Anderson (2018) recounted how African Americans were denied rights to fish, hunt, and work independently after they were emancipated, and thus inquired, “Under such conditions, how could people become self-sufficient?” (p. 26) This is evidence of the power of race blind policies too, as Bell (2106) wrote, “shape-shift into new forms to prevail against challenges to it” (p. 14). The Ku Klux Klan is the metaphorical epitome of race blind policies because the KKK is racism shamelessly pretending to hide behind a white sheet after the supposed defeat of the Confederate agenda, which was to preserve racial based oppression. This ideology is not reserved for the South, as Alexander (2020) reported, “Since World War I, Detroit had become Klan country, 35,000 strong” (p. 79). Race neutral policies are aligned with the dominant narrative because the dominant narrative has always been race neutral in its language, while oppression and expansion were centered around race. Racism, racially based slavery, and Indigenous displacement are exceptionized aspects of the curriculum, presented as outside of the achievements of the American democratic experiment. Sometimes these oppressive realities are even presented as “democratic” with terms like *popular sovereignty* and *states’ rights* used to explain and defend racism, but these oppressive developments spelled out in plain English normally do not (because they cannot) co-exist with the dominant narrative. There is no space for calling out these oppressions to redefine how the United States conceptualizes democracy. In

fact, these perspectives in relation to the core narrative are considered “unpatriotic” (Max & Larson, 2012).

Race Blind Policies

Race-blind policies and interpretations of the founding of the United States preserve the narrative that America was founded as a democracy and an exceptional nation-state that prioritizes justice and fair dispersal of power over totalitarian political rule. One study found that excluded content on racial violence “has an adverse effect on the larger sociocultural memory and sociocultural knowledge available to students, thus limiting the extent to which all students can truly understand the historical significance of racial inequities” (Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 150). The fact that political control was dispersed among a small minority of people (profiting over the oppression of thousands of others) is contradictory to the egalitarian themes embedded in the foundational documents of the American political experiment, like the Declaration of Independence and Preamble of the Constitution. However, this contradiction is rarely presented as a problem; it is not formulated as an inconsistency, because students do not question how the actual message generated from the dominant narrative and the documents stands in stark contrast to the actions of the oppressors and lived experiences of the oppressed in early American society. The contradiction is exceptionized. Bell (2106) reflected on group categories in the United States as foundations for oppression, stating that gender roles and racial designations “are ‘not real,’ but through implicit beliefs and social practices that operate as if real, they become so in practice” (p. 7). This is an important distinction for any student to understand, because in a nation built on egalitarian ideals, oppressive hierarchies are unacceptable. The supposed absence of oppressive stratification is what separates exceptional America from feudal Europe, or India’s castes, or the three estates system in pre-1789 France.

Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) stated that teachers must identify their own cultures before they can affirm the multiple cultures in their classrooms. However, this can be difficult for some White middle class teachers for two reasons. First is that the “culture” of the White middle class has been presented as the norm, the status quo, and the accepted culture in which all other cultures measure themselves against. Second, accompanying the notion of culture as diverse and positive is the idea that culture represents the best of society, “culture is a concept that includes refining and elevating elements, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought” (Said, 1993, xiii). But Said (1993) challenged this notion that culture is always positive and appealing to morality and Crotty (1993) wrote that culture can reflect society’s “contradictions and oppressions” (p. 159). The Southern Poverty Law Center (n.d.) indeed stated that violent white supremacy as embodied in the Ku Klux Klan is not an aberration of American culture. The KKK *is* American culture, intersecting racism, and patriarchy, and appealing to White men by drawing on the romanticism of feudalism with names like “wizard.” Yang (2020) reported that the KKK was a massive political force in the early 20th century North of the Mason-Dixon line, counting “200,000 members in New York alone, with strongholds on Long Island and in the state’s southern and far western counties” (p. 23). Merging these two ideas is complicated, the culture of an empire, of an imperialist political force presenting itself as a nation-state in the 20th and 21st centuries, manifests in the United States as White middle class Americans succeeding politically and economically at the dehumanization of others. Their culture is directly tied to imperialism and oppression, yet this aspect of culture is not recognized (it cannot be because it is too disruptive to the master narrative), and therefore White middle class America is presented as a sort of non-cultural norm. Marx and Larson (2013) stated that, “It is safe to say that most White educators at the kindergarten through twelve level are not

cognizant of their Whiteness, nor that of the curriculum in schools within which they work” (p. 291). The culture of White middle class America is, rather, tied to the Enlightenment rhetoric from the independence period on the 18th century, the rhetoric that is the backbone of the dominant narrative and vulnerable to the inclusion of multiple perspectives and excluded developments.

Bell et al. (2106) acknowledged that some White Americans are confused about how race impacts progress in the United States, and she explained “The use of historical information can help them understand the construction of whiteness as a vehicle to maintain privilege... (Hanley-Lopez, 2006)” (p. 170).” I argue that this strategy is more effective before students graduate high school and the information is presented to them as they are formulating their understanding of the United States, rather than when they are older and the information could be perceived as foreign, interrogatory, or, as Symcox (1999) wrote when explaining why the multiple perspective National History Standards of 1995 failed, “un-American” (p. 4).

As far back as 2012, Paris (2012) recognized this dissonance when they wrote about the “explicit goal of creating a mono-cultural and monolingual society based on White, middle-class norms of language and cultural being” (p. 95). The state of Arizona banned the study of ethnic groups (Paris, 2012) while other states are continually banning content in the third decade of the 21st century. Schwartz (2021) reported on a plethora of state legislatures considering a wide variety of bans that would prevent teachers from presenting content on race and gender. In 2021, New Hampshire was considering a ban on “any doctrine or theory promoting a negative account or representation of the founding and history of the United States of America” (Schwartz, 2021). The struggle is relentless, and Paris (2012) in fact lamented that, “The long struggle against dehumanizing deficit approaches to education and toward humanizing resource approaches has

never been easy” (p. 96). Westhoff and Johnston (2021), on a special about democracy and history in the *Journal of American History*, wrote that, “Senators Tom Cotton and Josh Hawley have put forward proposals to enforce traditional patriotism in their Orwellian ‘Save American History’ and ‘Love America’ bill” (p. 768). Sanchez (2021) concurred that the “backlash against factual interpretation of the past could also be brutal” (p. 255). This research sought to expand the understanding of the United States history curriculum, as it is presented in New York State, in this struggle.

Voting and Curriculum

The story of the United States is inextricably linked to notions of democracy, participation, and dispersed power carried over from Europe, even though Indigenous People allowed women more representation than European settlers (Alonso, 1994). The concept of participation in a European American government is deeply embedded into the United States history curriculum, from colonial governments starting with the Virginia House of Burgesses to dynamics among the three branches of government after the American Revolution, while Indigenous democracies are often ignored (Shear et al., 2015). Ideas about citizenship and responsibility are diverse and the conceptualization of participation can vary. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) referenced systemic injustice when they compared the goals of citizenship education, such as personal responsibility (which requires obedience and volunteerism) to justice citizenship (which requires interrogating the system). Justice oriented education requires an understanding of “the interplay of social, economic, and political forces” and the “root causes of problems” (Westhemier & Kahne, 2004, p. 242). “In other words, if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personal responsibility citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover” (Westhemier &

Kahne, 2004, p. 242). Schultz (2018) quoted his fifth-grade student Dyneisha, who spectacularly summarized justice style learning “as a ‘way to learn how the government works and ways to work the government’” (p. 21). For justice-oriented citizens, to acknowledge the root problem, one must *understand the system by design* and how it benefits (and is designed to benefit) certain groups. Focusing on individualism, and the role of key individuals, absolves the system that is designed for winners and losers, a system that hides in a society branded as egalitarian.

Jane Mayer (2017) interrogated the economic and political forces that shape the trajectory of American elections in the 20th and 21st centuries. United States history standardized tests in New York question students on the participatory aspect of democracy and present the 17th Amendment as the solution to any past influences of corporate interests on elections. Mayer (2017) documented the unraveling of these protections and the extensive connections between financial power of billionaire Americans and their impact on American elections. These are more modern developments in American history and students deserve to see the through line between past and present, especially as the American democratic experiment is threatened by censorship and disenfranchisement. According to a recent article in the *Journal of American History*, Fischer (2022) wrote “Ignoring burning questions about the recent past... amounts to historical malpractice” (p. 772-773) because when historians fail to link past and present and “engage students in ethical dilemmas of our time, they abrogate one of their main responsibilities” (p. 772-773). Current events both domestic and globally are voluminous and constantly changing, however there have been key turning points in the 21st century that are critical for students to understand the trajectory of the American democratic experiment.

The Supreme Court Case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee* in 2010 overturned “a century of restrictions banning corporations and unions from spending all they

wanted to elect candidates... and ... eviscerated a century of reform” (Mayer, 2017, p. 281). The reasoning of the court, that contributions to PACs (political action committees) limited to 5,000 thousand dollars per person were a violation of free speech, were perceived by some as a weaponization of the First Amendment against democracy. The dissent of the Court stated:

The basic premise underlying the Court’s ruling is its iteration, and constant reiteration, of the proposition that the First Amendment bars regulatory distinctions based on a speaker’s identity, including its “identity” as a corporation. While that glittering generality has rhetorical appeal, it is not a correct statement of the law” (Citizens United v. FEC, 2010).

The impacts of the decision were severe, as Mayer reported the first election after the *Citizens United* (2010) decision counted over one billion dollars spent to influence federal outcomes, a number that far surpasses the two million dollars (11 million dollars in 2012 currency) to Nixon’s campaign in 1972, which caused “as The Washington Post’s Dan Baltz observed ‘public outrage’” (p. 12). In addition, American billionaires the Koch brothers and friends spent around \$889 million on the 2016 elections, “completely dwarfing the sum that was considered corrupt during the Watergate days” (Mayer, 2017, p. 12). This development empowers the superrich, the “.01% as political gatekeepers” (Mayer, 2017, p. 408) and moves the United States towards a plutocracy and away from democracy. *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) is one of two highly consequential Supreme Court cases in the first fifth of the 21st century, the other being *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which will be discussed in a later section. Both cases are absent in classroom evidence used to understand voting procedures and election integrity.

Democracy orbits around the tension of representation and power, and the questions citizens are left to consider is: Do candidates represent people or special interests? With

unlimited funding potential the integrity of American elections is at an increased risk. And yet, while the current curriculum includes the 17th Amendment as the 20th century solution to corruption, and the election of the first African American president as a major accomplishment of the 21st century, it fails to teach or even recognize the impacts of the *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) decision, nor does it connect these developments to other anti-corruption regulations. The curriculum seeks to demonstrate a positive progression towards democratic and moral ideas, yet it fails to connect developments that display a regression from democracy or a movement towards oppression or authoritarianism. There is no link between the *Citizens United* (2010) decision and its regressive impacts from the Progressive Era regulations that were designed to bolster American democracy and ensure the power remains with the public.

The trajectory of suffrage is positive and inclusive in the United States history curriculum, jumping from White property-owning males to White males, to African Americans, to women, to Indigenous People. The poll tax, grandfather clause, and literacy tests are taught as relics of the Old South that took a bit longer to overcome, but the successes of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act of the 1960s are celebrated as conclusive achievements. The fact that “Indigenous Peoples did not receive citizen status in the United States until 1924, and their ability to vote was not fully granted until the 1960’s” (Shear at al., 2015, p. 74) is rarely connected to the linear discussion of enfranchisement. The election of Barack Obama is an important development in the curriculum that signals progress in 21st century America. Anderson (2018) reported on this election in specific numbers, citing that 69% of newcomers to the ballot box had voted for Obama. The narrative among opponents soon shifted to cries of voter fraud, and “the new scheme veiled the white rage behind a legitimate sounding concern: protecting the integrity of the ballot box from voter fraud” (Anderson, 2018, p. 202). The Supreme Court Case

of *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) was a victory for those dismayed by the increase in voter turn-out, because this 2013 decision declared sections 4 and 5 of the iconic National Voting Rights Act of 1965 (NVRA) unconstitutional. These sections mandated a preclearance to change voting procedures by states with a history of disenfranchisement. As part of a Civil Rights Unit of the 1950's and 1960's, the NVRA is sometimes connected to prior legal developments in the curriculum, such as the 15th Amendment and the poll tax and literacy tests, but it is rarely connected and tested as a measure of voting rights in the 21st century, and the *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) decision is absent from the curriculum entirely. The impact of *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) is that large swaths of previously enfranchised people were disenfranchised because Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia all passed voter suppression laws (Anderson, 2018). Texas Governor Abbott argued there would be chaos at the polls without the newly passed Voter ID laws in a post-*Shelby County v. Holder* Texas, even though “out of ten million votes, Abbott could only produce ten cases of voter impersonation” (Anderson, 2018, p. 218). According to Newkirk (2018), “There is functionally now no preemptive federal oversight of state and local voting laws.” The defendant of the case, former Attorney General Eric Holder, Jr., reflected on the *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) decision in the *American Educator* in 2020, “A landmark report on voter fraud conducted by the Brennan Center found that an individual is more likely to ‘be struck by lightning’ than to cast a fraudulent in- person ballot” (Holder, 2020). This case elicited an iconic line of reasoning from Justice Ginsberg who explained that cancelling Sections 4 and 5 of the NVRA was problematic because, “Volumes of evidence supported Congress’ determination that the prospect of retrogression was real. Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because

you are not getting wet” (*Shelby County v. Holder*, 2013). Both the reasoning and consequences of the *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) decision are a seismic shift towards federal permission of voter suppression, both ideologically and practically, in 21st century America (Bell et al., 2016). “With the addition of these new pieces of jurisprudence, the Court has established that not only are the legacies of Jim Crow no longer a valid justification for proactive restrictions on states, but the Court doesn’t necessarily have a role in advancing the spirit of the franchise” (Newkirk II, 2018). The exclusion of *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) in the curriculum, a critical Supreme Court cases in the 21st century, is a signal that the master narrative of the United States as a progressive democracy is still influencing how curriculum is crafted.

Black Criminality and the Curriculum

After the Civil War, high school students learn about the Reconstruction Era, and the struggle between the federal government and Southern states to incorporate Black Americans into the economic, political, and social community of the United States. The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments liberated and enfranchised, while the Black codes and Jim Crow laws restricted and segregated. The Freedman’s Bureau provided opportunity, while the Ku Klux Klan and sharecropping system terrorized and exploited. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision solidified the Southern victory to sustain a racial hierarchy despite the disintegration of the Confederate States of America in 1865. The chronological curriculum normally moves to the next unit, either Industrialization or Immigration followed by the Progressive Era. After World War I, students will return to Black studies with topics such as the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance. This is significant because there are substantial developments and intersections of African American experiences and academic research in between those periods that are ignored. Students do not learn about all the ways African Americans experienced disaccumulation, which is the

denial of economic mobility to ensure they remained in the lowest financial caste (Taylor, 2009). Both Michelle Alexander in her work *The New Jim Crow* (2020) and Khalil Gibran Muhammed's *Condemnation of Blackness* (2010) explained how the "documentation" of Black criminality at the turn of the 20th century continued for decades and impacted the ability of formerly enslaved people and their posterity to experience the social mobility upon which the United States prides itself on. Alexander (2020) acknowledged the connection between social mobility and the master narrative when she wrote, "We recognize that mobility may be difficult, but the key to our collective self-image is the assumption that mobility is always possible, so failure to move up reflects on one's character... reflects very poorly on the group as a whole" (Alexander, 2020, p. 16). The foundation of this logic is contingent on a fair system and connects with the meritocratic element in the master narrative, yet Alexander documented the highly unfair nature of the American incarceration, which "imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities" (p. 8) at a rate that is higher than anywhere in the world and keeps African Americans "locked up and locked out of mainstream society" (p. 8). If the system is unfair, as Alexander (2020), Muhammad (2010) and Anderson (2018) have argued, then the logic of social mobility is compromised. In other words, if culturally relevant education (Ladson-Billings, 1995) underscores the inclusion of marginalized voices, we are forced to ask, how do we create spaces for marginalized voices that will interrogate the hierarchical structure and ideology upon which the United States is founded upon? As a result of her research, Alexander (2020) prefers the term caste to class because the former denotes a restrictive placement in society, thus rejecting the mobility narrative.

The Black codes are normally taught as social and economic history that denied formerly enslaved people the right to interact with White people, whether that be in marriage or a game of

checkers or to move freely through the job market. The crime data created from the turn of the century is ignored in the curriculum, and the fact that white scientists used crime data as “objective, colorblind, and incontrovertible” (Muhammad, 2010, p. 4) while White crime was forgiven and contextualized as a product of poverty, is also excluded. While race scientists like Charles Davenport initially relied on physical differences to prove White superiority (Okrent, 2019), these eventually debunked theories were replaced by behavioral differences between Blacks and Whites that were presented as more academically sound and statistically objective (Muhammad, 2010). This argument found new fodder in the “War on Drugs” in the 1980s, when crack cocaine tore apart Black communities, and the Regan administration used this opportunity to “criminalize and demonize Black people and provide the federal resources to make incarceration the norm” (Anderson, 2018, p. 186). The experience of African Americans post-emancipation and particularly after 1900 has been greatly reduced to show progress (e.g., 1954’s *Brown v. Board of Education*, Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, the election of Barack Obama) while ignoring a myriad of significant developments (e.g., the invention of Black crime, the Tulsa Massacre, redlining, the Kerner Commission report, incarceration) that compromise the master narrative.

Labor and the Curriculum

The efforts of labor activists are distorted in survey U.S. History courses in a variety of ways. Apple (2019) charged that history curriculum will typically “minimize the history of the concrete struggles workers had to engage in” (p. 102), which was often to obtain a decent standard of living. Zimmerman (2002) explained the struggle to include balanced perspectives on collective bargaining and workers’ compensation in early 20th century textbooks was due to supposed fears of “‘anti-American’ or even ‘socialist’ implications” (p. 27). Cole et al. (2011)

researched four major history textbooks to reveal how labor is depicted to American students, and they found that the included and excluded content demonized labor activities and absolved abusive, workplace practices by employers. Abusive practices towards laborers are continually exceptionized. For example, when union organizers were advocating for basic human conditions, Cole et al. (2011) noted the textbooks used language to describe them as “‘unhappy, ‘discontented,’ and ‘making demands’” (p. 13) and “American Vision [one of the researched textbooks] refers three times in one page to workers “‘resentment’ of low wages and income disparity” (p. 12). Resentment is a word with a clearly negative connotation, even though labor organizers were fighting oppression and injustice. The fact that several leaders of the 1886 Haymarket Riot were falsely accused and executed is mostly ignored in the textbooks (Cole et al., 2011), which suggests that survey history curriculum forgives government violence against those that threaten the economic hierarchy. The failure to hold corporate leaders accountable for crimes against humanity with the humans being their very own employees, such as the 146 people that perished in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, is educational neglect. It denies students the opportunity to connect prior labor disasters to the present, such as the “West Virginia mine disaster or Deepwater Horizon oil rig catastrophe” (Cole et al., 2011, p. 24). Cole et al. (2011) clearly summarized the impact of such vocabulary choices, framings, and omissions on American students who, “can’t be expected to understand the pervasiveness and power of monopolies... and their effect to limit the opportunities and impoverish the lives of regular working people” (p. 23). The movement of labor organization after the 1950s is mostly absent, particularly among teachers (the very people delivering the content in these books to students!) Connections to modern labor victories are ignored and there is “no acknowledgement of the emergence and expansion of the public and professional employee movement and the expansion

of collective bargaining rights...since 1960” (Cole et al., 2011). This is problematic for two reasons. First it denies students a more complete picture of labor evolution in the 20th century. Second is it prevents the understanding of decisions evolving labor rights in the 21st century, such as in the *Janus v. AFSCME* (2018) case, where the Supreme Court ruled unions can no longer automatically collect fees to cover the cost of collective bargaining.

Foreign Policy and the Curriculum

Foreign policy is an important component of the United States history curriculum, and this is but a brief overview in an overwhelming sea of information that attempts to confront included as well as excluded historical developments. Despite the violent capture of North American lands from Indigenous People since the 15th century, the curriculum does not officially recognize “imperialism” until the late 19th century, with a unit orbiting around the Spanish-American War. The war was a quick victory for the United States government in the summer of 1898, and the resulting decades long movement for Puerto Rican independence, including an attempted assassination against President Truman and the medical atrocities of Dusty Rhodes against Puerto Ricans, is mostly ignored (Arablouei & Abdelfatah, 2019). Also absent is the resulting second war in the Philippines which was a tumultuous interaction that strays far from the master narrative. The Philippine-American War (1899-1902) of conquest is not a staple in the curriculum, despite its violence and length which was over ten times as long as the Spanish-American War. One of President McKinley’s speeches to justify U.S. colonization of the Philippines (after promising them independence) not only invokes divine right saying that God “came to him” with a solution, but also weaponizes the consent of the governed to grant the United States the right to determine who is fit for self-government and who is not (Mintz & McNeil, 2018). This directly contradicts the philosophical underpinnings of the nation’s

founding, and yet in excluding the Philippine-American War from the central tenets of an Imperialism Unit, students are denied the opportunity to dialogue about the transition of America into a colonizing world force beyond political reasoning (such as the yellow journalism used to justify the Cuban invasion).

The United States government's support of Latin American dictators in the 20th century, such as the Somoza regime in Nicaragua or Pinochet in Chile, is sometimes mentioned but surely not centered as the world wars are. The world wars are the centerpieces of 20th century history, and the United States is normally celebrated as the victor nation fighting moral battles, especially in World War II and surely in the goals of World War I. The narrative of World War II presents a binary situation where the United States was forced into a conflict with the Axis Powers after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The topic of the United States in World War II contains a plethora of research, so I will try to remain within the major content pillars of a survey U.S. history course while acknowledging some excluded content. The study of World War II includes America's initial isolationist policy, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, total war with topics like victory gardens and Rosie the Riveter, and the brewing of the Cold War. The internment of Japanese Americans under Executive Order 9066 is contextualized under the theme of federal protection of the nation. However, other developments that complicate the American Second World War narrative are completely invisible on New York State exams. For example, Nazism was appealing to some Americans, including the 20,000 that attended a rally at Madison Square Garden in 1939 (Curry, 2017). In that same year, the Roosevelt administration rejected a boatload of Jewish refugees when they arrived in Florida and sent the St. Louis ship back to Europe, which condemned most of the passengers to their death (Lanchin, 2014). In the documentary *Fog of War* (2003), Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense, explained that

the Americans would have been indicted for war crimes if they have been defeated in 1945. Under the leadership of Airforce General Curtis LeMay and approval of President Roosevelt, the Americans firebombed 67 Japanese cities killing over a half of a million Japanese citizens, and that was all before the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Morris, 2003). The curriculum does include Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs and will sometimes involve debates over the necessity of this choice in August 1945, but the firebombing across Japan is excluded. Including the firebombing in the curriculum might blemish America's World War II narrative and present more of a complex history that is not entirely aligned to the master narrative. This exclusion leads to the critique from Apple (2019) that "Good/bad terms have always dominated the American political landscape, especially in terms of international relations" (p. 178).

Foreign policy in the post-World War II era is focused on the United States and the Soviet Union, the development of nuclear weapons, their competition for territory, and the arms race. The danger from the Cuban Missile Crisis is a major focus point, with Kennedy's strategic decision making emphasized for its peaceful impact. And the fact that Americans had missiles stationed in Turkey pointing at the Soviets is sometimes included as an afterthought. There are other significant foreign policy developments in the 20th century that are excluded or marginalized in the curriculum, and these range from U.S. support of the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, to the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile to a massacre in south Asia. Bass (2013) described Nixon and Kissinger's alliance with a murderous south Asian regime that is excluded from United States history curriculum. Despite reports from intelligence and diplomats about a massacre in what today is Bangladesh, (including from Archer Blood, the title bureaucrat of Bass's book, *The Blood Telegram*), Bass wrote, "Nixon and Kissinger were

unyielding in their support of Pakistan, making possible horrific crimes against humanity - plausibly even a genocide - in that country's eastern wing" (p. xiv). The historical developments surrounding Operation Searchlight are mostly lost in the curriculum even though other foreign policies from the Nixon administration are widely covered, from Vietnamization to his visit to China. Bass (2013) concluded that "... this major incident has largely been whitewashed out of their (Nixon and Kissinger's) legacy..." (p. xvi). While serving as Secretary of State, the most important foreign policy position in the United States government besides the President, Kissinger was also involved with Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Dinges (2004) researched the political relationship between Kissinger and Pinochet, especially during the Sheridan Circle bombing. On September 21, 1976, Orlando Letelier, an economist and exile of the Pinochet regime, was killed in an act of international terrorism right in Washington D.C.'s Sheridan Circle. Dinges (2004) concluded, as a result of his extensive research on the event, that:

The Letelier assassination was ordered by a close ally, a dictator [Augusto Pinochet] the United States helped install, maintain, and defend in power; it was planned by an intelligence official who had been on the CIA payroll and who traveled frequently for consultation with CIA officials in Washington; it was carried out by DINA, a newly created security organization whose personnel were trained in Chile by a CIA team; it was detected in its initial operational stages not by alert spy craft but by the very chumminess of CIA officials with those planning the crimes (p. 248).

The extent to which the United States knew about or participated in the bombing is still undetermined. Yet this "major act of international terrorism" (Dinges, 2004, p. 248) on U.S. soil is absent from the curriculum, thus denying students the chance to understand the Cold War on more complex terms and investigate these situations through research and discourse. According

to Westhoff and Johnston (2022), a wide range of available evidence is critical for students to practice listening and further democracy, which was the purported mission of the Cold War.

Women in the Curriculum

In 1971, the American novelist Janice Law Trecker wrote a scathing critique of women's representation in United States history textbooks for the National Council for the Social Studies. Her criticisms span a variety of categories: women only appear in "extra" sessions, omission is the central problem, and the generic terms *Americans* or *people* usually refers to the occupation, struggles, and achievements of men. Professionally, the roles women traditionally filled in medicine or education were actually restricted once they became formalized careers with degrees, because women were excluded from specialized high schools and higher education in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Trecker (1971) summarized the chronological trajectory of female narratives across grade school history textbooks: industrial exploitation at Lowell, Massachusetts, the Seneca Falls Declaration, and fighting for temperance and abolition. Women are sprinkled in the Progressive Era (e.g., Ida Tarbell, Jane Addams) and then the 19th Amendment victory is the celebrated pinnacle. Finally, Trecker wrote "They joined the armed forces for the first time during the second World War and thereafter have enjoyed the good life in America" (p. 252). This summary written in 1971 from an analysis of twelve 1960s textbooks is not much different from the curriculum I was familiarized with as a social studies teacher in the 2000s. I would add the Equal Rights Amendment was included as was *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which was taught as a victory, albeit a controversial one, for women's health and privacy. It has been decades since Trecker's review, and so little has changed. Pioneering women for peace are excluded, like Jeanette Rankin, the only sitting member of Congress to vote against United States entry into World War II, and Emily Green Balch, Noble Peace Prize winner (Alonso, 1994).

Women's participation in peace efforts before World War I and World War II are also beyond the scope of the curriculum, and any diplomatic efforts for peace, like the 1927 Kellogg-Briand Pact signed in the inter-war years, are divorced from the endeavors of women to organize and advocate for peaceful resolutions (Alonso, 1994). Even beyond the exclusion of significant women with major achievements in their field, the general experiences of 50% of the population are still extras, add-ons, and outside the norm. Trecker (1971) reported that only male activities were described in the textbook sections on the American West, such as their tools, their shooters, and their plows. The work of women is absent entirely and young readers could learn more about women's work and women's contributions and sacrifices from novels than they can from history classes. One example to share from Australian writer Colleen McCullough is an excerpt from her novel *The Thorn Birds* (1977), an acclaimed Australian family saga that appeared on Queen Elizabeth II's "Big Jubilee Read" in 2022 (Reading Agency, 2022). In the novel, a family moves from New Zealand to Australia to start a new life on a vast sheep farm. In getting to know the landscape, the men are out all day, hunting, riding horses, and acclimating to their new environment in the Australian Outback. But McCullough recognized that this is not the only adjustment and labor that mattered. Some of the most critical work was taking place in a less glorious, less adventurous place: the home. The difference in experiences between the men and women in the family was worthy of this paragraph:

Tied to the house and its immediate environs, the women found life much less to their liking, for they had not the leisure or the excuse to ride, nor did they have the stimulation of varying activities. It was just harder to do what women always did: cook, clean, wash, iron, care for babies. They battled the heat, the dust, the flies... (McCullough, 1977, p. 95)

I will never forget encountering this paragraph in 2017. After reading those three sentences, it was like a flash had gone off before my eyes. The work many women do, the work they have always done, is mostly invisible, and has been in the story of the United States since the beginning of our written curriculum. I had been teaching for over ten years at that point and I was guilty as charged. I did not thoroughly teach women's history but rather a patriarchal, sanitized version of women's history. One paragraph from a novel had shifted my conceptualizing of the female workload and contribution to society more than any primary source I had read or encountered. And this is surely not to say the words from the Declaration of Sentiments were not impactful. However, like other seminal documents, they were perceived as extra, and the focus of the document in the curriculum centers around suffrage. The authors are presented as pursuing a glorious democratic right. It was a right women should never have been denied, yet it felt bold and sophisticated to request publicly. And ultimately, the patriarchy conceded. But the work of many women from across the nation, the sweeping, the laundry, the cleaning, the dishes, the birthing, the nursing, the death (from birthing), the losses to coverture, are not emphasized in the Regents exams by the words carved out of the Seneca Falls Convention. That work is a give-in by the patriarchy, it is assumed to be done, and therefore it is excluded from even being story worthy, or history worthy.

The exclusion of this work is why a small paragraph from *The Thorn Birds* resonated so deeply with me. One of the few times ordinary experiences are highlighted as a central point in the curriculum is when innovations eased the burden of housework for women, such as when electrical appliances like the vacuum and dishwasher became popular in the 1920s. Yet interestingly the burden of domestic work in all the centuries *before these inventions* is mostly invisible. Trecker (1971) described this omission aptly in the conclusion of her curriculum

studies by stating “More information about how ordinary people lived and what they actually did must be included” (p. 338). While coverture is one of the legal systems that impacted millions of ordinary, married women, it is absent from the U.S. History Regents exam.

Coverture

Coverture is a term for laws restricting the rights of married women, including political, economic, social, and legal decision making. Coverture is a more complicated topic than suffrage because of its diversity, unlike suffrage which only has a few differentiations. For example, full suffrage meant women could vote in all local, state, and federal elections, partial suffrage, meant women could vote in only local or school board elections, and no suffrage meaning women were entirely disenfranchised. Conversely, coverture stems from a wide and almost incalculable number of laws, differing between states and localities across the United States. The different laws impacted women in a variety of ways. The patriarchy would explain coverture as a simple protective system that covers the woman to ensure her safety and happiness. The man “covers” and the woman provides children, a clean home, and meals. Yet the research from primary source documents over 100 years ago indicates that women felt differently about the arrangement.

Being that the survey U.S. curriculum is a nation-building endeavor (Schmidt, 2012), the absence of significant legal doctrines with widespread impact is suspicious. Primary sources from the 19th and 20th centuries reveal the extent to which coverture effected women’s lives and the ways in which women combatted coverture. For example, there was a notification in a San Francisco news bulletin stating women gained the right to choose their tombstone and burial plot in Boston (*Daily Evening Bulletin from San Francisco*). Surely when one thinks about freedom, deciding one’s own burial plot does not come to mind. And yet this was one of the many rights

denied to women because of coverture. This topic is entirely excluded in the survey U.S. history course and its omission denies students a knowledge and depth of understanding around patriarchy and gender equality in the United States.

Impact of Coverture

One of the ways coverture impacted women was through physical injury and rights to labor. Women were denied access to compensation for an injury and damages resulting from her inability to labor because of the injury. As Mary White Ogden wrote in *Life and Labor* magazine in 1921, “If you live in the state of Kansas, don’t fall downstairs and break your good right arm, for it is really your husbands right arm you will have broken, and he alone can recover damage for it” (para. 1). The idea of owning women’s labor is economic in nature and a noteworthy indication that coverture was more than a political issue. This also bridges Enlightenment ideology to economics and control. In Harris’ (1993) interpretation of Locke’s definition of property, she explained “one’s physical labor was one’s property” (p. 1735). Yet, women did not own their own labor because of coverture laws.

In introducing the new journal *Critical Historical Studies*, Goswami et al. (2014), wrote about the importance of economic and financial developments in historical research. These economic aspects, particularly in America’s capitalist society, normally present themselves as political or neutral, but must be exposed and examined through a historical lens. Whether it be “direct exploitation [or] the general commodification of social and cultural life” (Goswami et al., 2014, p. 3), uncovering the economic aspect of social systems provides a new lens for many historical developments in the study of U.S. history. In the U.S. curriculum in general, the economic justification for multiple institutions such as slavery or settler colonialism, are excluded. The extent to which the wealth of the United States was built on cotton plantations, is

often left out in favor of other information about the political compromises and amendments related to enslavement. Ladson-Billings (1998) and Taylor (2009) both connected property to economic potential and coverture ensured women would remain inferior because they were denied the right to both property and labor. That aspect of oppression is invisible in the survey United States history course.

Summary

Trecker (1971) summed up the power of the master narrative when assessing the latent patriarchy in U.S. history textbooks.

Real change in the way history is presented will only come after those responsible for writing it, and for interpreting the finished product to students, develop an awareness of the bias against women in our culture, a bias so smooth, seamless, and pervasive, that it is hard to even begin to take hold of it and bring it into clear view (Trecker, 1971, p. 138).

The literature is rich in interest and research around the importance of identifying and deconstructing the master narrative, and in a multicultural curriculum that is crafted around diverse content resources and multiple perspectives and experiences. Bell (2016) recognized that “...as hidden historical stories are reclaimed, people in the present weave a new understanding of the interconnections among struggles for justice” (p. 18). However, the recognized gaps in the research are the content pillars, vocabulary choices, and permutations that have traditionally cultivated and maintained the master narrative in high school United States history courses, despite the discourse around critical and culturally responsive social studies education.

The research in the next chapter will explore a framework to examine the content on the United States Regents exams, a summative assessment required for high school graduation in New York State. Three exams per year will be examined between 2001-2020, which was a two-

decade period with a single format: 50 multiple-choice questions arranged in chronological order, one thematic essay, and one document-based essay question. The research focused on the content in the multiple-choice questions, and the narrative that emerges from the permutation of questions on single exams as well as from one exam to the next.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology

Why the Regents Exam

This research focused on the United States History and Government Regents exam, sometimes shortened to the U.S. History Regents, a standardized history exam mandatory for high school graduation in New York State. Curriculum is not a clearly defined term because it is more than textbooks and standards; curriculum can be practices and ideas that are shaped in spaces and communities (Brown & Au, 2014; Gaztambide-Fernandez & Thiessen, 2012). Cherryholmes (1988) wrote that while curriculum is diverse in definition, curriculum is “what students have an opportunity to learn” (p. 133) and the processes that provide those opportunities. This research seeks to contribute to an increased understanding of written curriculum. Aoki (1993) termed the curriculum that is written and delivered to teachers as codified knowledge, the planned curriculum, a curriculum that is often penned without considering the diverse students who will interact with and learn from it. He called for a defocusing of the modernist grip on curriculum and replacing it with “thoughtful everyday narratives” (Aoki, 1993, p. 263). The defocusing of this grip requires an understanding of content, developments, and messages that have fostered and supported a master narrative. In the planned curriculum, teachers and students are mostly absent from the creation process, the framing narrative, the goals, and the included content in their lessons. For example, although students are taught to analyze primary sources in the social studies curriculum, critical thinking is covertly stifled when students are denied interactions with materials that represent excluded historical developments. The perception is that students are critically thinking, but in contrast, when limiting students’ exposure to certain documents related only to popular developments

curated outside the classroom, the planned curriculum is perpetuating, as Apple (2019) wrote, “pro-consensus and anti-dissent belief structures” (p. 98).

Researchers, teachers, and students are not powerless in their roles, they are able to examine the planned curriculum resources on a deeper level, to understand better how they are framed and to analyze them as materials on a mission, rather than a collection of objective curriculum goals. These curriculum materials are not a value free assemblage of documents and accompanying questions, but are rather purposely selected sources, and Apple (2019) explained that in building educational resources, there are “conscious and unconscious social and ideological choices that are made” (p. 15). This research explored the narrative resulting from these choices in one curriculum resource, a mandatory high school standardized history exam.

In New York State, the Regents exams are a type of written, planned curriculum that provides guidance for teacher instruction. While survey history textbooks are filled with thousands of pages of information that cannot all be taught in 180 instructional days, the Regents exam is a quick chronological overview of mandatory content. The U.S. History Regents exam is a default curriculum guide because skimming the 50 multiple-choice questions, which are arranged in chronological order, was the easiest and fastest way for a new social studies teacher to master the content pillars, plan lessons, ensure their students pass the exam, please their administration, and earn tenure. According to research, high stakes assessments impact and are a part of curriculum and instruction and indeed Regents exam preparation is a focus for instructional strategies and professional development sessions in New York State high schools. Morgan and Saxton (2006) explained the result of the standardization of externally imposed exams on the education process by stating “the curriculum is narrowed, [and] tests come to define our priorities” (p. 104). Dickens (2021) summarized from multiple authors:

There is now substantial empirical evidence that ‘high stakes’ qualifications and their attendant textual artefacts and practices shape pedagogical practice in schools globally, discursively as well as practically (Torrence, 2017, p, 83)- so-called “backwash” (Baird et al. 2017), which ‘trickles down’ throughout the system in anticipation of assessment requirements (Madaus & Russell, 2010) (p. 694).

The “anticipation of assessment requirements” is important when an exam like the Regents follows a predictable format year after year. For example, when the U.S. History Regents asked one multiple-choice question predictably on every exam about colonial settlements or Enlightenment accomplishments, teachers ensure that content is included in their lessons.

A Brief History of the Regents Exam

The United States History and Government Regents exam has been administered to high school students in New York State since the year 1876 (New York State Education Department, 2016). It has undergone changes to content and structure over the decades, and by the late 20th century most public-school students were required to pass the U.S. History Regents exam to earn a New York State Regents diploma. Private schools are still exempt from the Regents exams, but many still administer the core five Regents exams in U.S. history, global history, and English language arts, plus one math and one science so their students can graduate with a New York State Regents diploma (k12academics, n.d.).

Graduation Requirements

A passing score of 65 on the United States history exam, from 2001-2020, was required for high school graduation with a few exceptions. Some students could still graduate with a score of 55 if they passed other mandatory Regents exams (e.g., math, science, global history, and

English). Some students with an individualized education plan qualified for a different, more accessible version of the history Regents called the RCT, Regents Competency Tests. Then this version was phased out in 2005 because the Board of Regents was moving towards rigorous, uniform standards (New York State Education Department, 2016), thus elevating the significance of the Regents exam. This exam was the focus of this research because most high school students needed to pass it in order to graduate from 2001-2020, it served as a default curriculum for history instruction, and it impacted teacher and school ratings.

Timeframe of Administration in New York State

The Regents exams are administered three times per year. June is the main administration date, as that is when most students complete their yearlong survey United States history course and sit for the exam. The August and January administrations are for students who might have failed in June and need to score a passing grade or students that completed a summer school course in U.S. History and are attempting to pass the exam. There is no stated difference in content or structure between the June, August, and January exams, therefore this study included every exam during the administration period from 2001-2020.

Epistemological Position

This research is oriented around constructionism, which recognizes the power of enculturation. The theoretical perspective is critical inquiry because it refutes the idea that one, true history exists in a mandatory, survey United States history course that attempts to appear objective in its presentation of content. While many agreed upon facts exist in United States history, such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a Supreme Court case decided in 1896 or Shirley Chisholm ran for president in 1972, there are historical positions and narratives that are suggested in the selection and construction of these facts, in the crafting of curriculum products

like exams where the inclusion of some facts that might favor a certain perspective. The intersection of objectivity (the idea that understanding of one truth is universal) and relativism (the idea that understanding is relative to one's position in society) is complicated in the discipline of history as Novick (1988) documented in his seminal work. Aligning history to science, with an objective search for one truth, was the bedrock of the history discipline in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Relativism began to interrogate objectivity in the 1930's with historians like Charles Beard (Novick, 1988) and educators like Harold Rugg (Kliebard, 2004). Rugg attempted to center social justice in the social studies curriculum, prioritizing the confrontation of social problems in American society. His book sales were successful after the 1929 stock market crash but then he was branded as anti-American by businesses and other groups like Daughters of the Colonial Wars, being accused of teaching an unbiased history rather than an American history (Kliebard, 2004). In the post-World War II and Cold War Era, relativism was linked to totalitarian governments, whether that be fascism or communism, with the objective truth serving as "the distinctive epistemological posture of the Free World" (Novick, 1988, p. 295). Novick (1988) quoted Orwell in a 1944 letter to show the turn towards objectivism when Orwell argued "that 'The really frightening thing about totalitarianism is not that it commits 'atrocities' but that it attacks the concept of objective truth'" (p. 290). This juncture between objective truth and relative experience is a complicated philosophical, ideological, and historical space. Reconciling this and connecting it with more modern calls for culturally responsive education is not an easy task. I think educators can recognize that there are objective truths while also understanding that the collection of truths into a larger narrative (with perceptions of those truths from a single perspective) becomes relative to the goals of the collector, whether that be a single author, a government, a group of scholars, or a

nation. Therefore, the more perspectives students are exposed to, the more thoroughly they can understand, grapple, and analyze multiple causes and multiple effects of historical developments. Multiple perspectives create space for teachers and students to interrogate latent motivations in how a single narrative might have been constructed over time. Weiler (2011) wrote “When groups or individuals are absent from the historical narrative, they are also outside the common understanding of what constitutes community or state” (p. 252), and he continued that “In their narratives of the past, historians delimit, include, and exclude who counts as members of that community. Thus, history writing, like all other forms of academic writing, is political” (p. 252).

This research recognizes that standardized exams are more than a collection of fact-based questions or essay prompts. They are a form of academic writing because they create academic expectations and standards for millions of students. This research examined how both the collection and exclusion of historical developments were operating to formulate a position about the purpose, legacy, and future of the United States from 2001 to 2020.

Research Purpose

The goal of this study was to understand how the master narrative lives in the U.S. History Regents exam, in both the included content and excluded content. Excluded content, in this research, means the information and historical developments that do not appear on the exam, while included content represents the content that is chosen by which exam questions are framed. The study used discourse analysis to explore how the organization of the chosen, including historical developments generated a master narrative. As defined in Chapter 1, this research understands the master narrative in United States history as one that denotes enlightened egalitarian values, progress, meritocracy, and exceptionalism as core to the inception and

evolution of a democratic United States, with underlying oppositional power imbalances from white supremacy, hereditary aristocracy, and patriarchy.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the intersection between the master narrative and the high school survey United States History course in the state of New York. The research interrogated the United States History high school curriculum by understanding the ways the content embedded in the United States history Regents exam aligned to a master narrative from 2001-2020. This was achieved by identifying and examining the popular historical developments in the exam that serve a schematic narrative template (Werstch, 2008) of American progress, exceptionalism, meritocracy, egalitarianism, and Western style democracy. Furthermore it was accomplished by identifying and examining historical developments that were marginalized, exceptionized, or excluded entirely from the current curriculum, because they might reveal trends that challenge the master narrative, such as white supremacy, hereditary aristocracy, or patriarchy.

Research Questions

How did the multiple-choice questions on the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam from 2001-2020 generate a narrative about the story of the United States?

- What patterns and trends were revealed in the included historical developments across the 57 exams?
- Did the language choices in both question formations and response options reflect a narrow perspective or assume a predetermined conclusion?
- Which critical historical developments were excluded entirely from the 2,850 questions?

Researcher Positionality

The gap in knowledge cannot be entirely addressed in a single paper and is reflective of a larger effort, as the endeavor to include multiple perspectives indeed requires multiple perspectives. The totality of this work was captured by Bell (2016), who wrote “The more institutionalized... and embedded these practices become, the more difficult it is to see how they have been constructed in the first place” (p. 6). I recognize there are likely situations where the master narrative is still blind to me, as Vिलлеверде et al. (2006) wrote, “Human beings always see the world from a particular vantage point” (p. 323), therefore this is a work in progress in many ways. As a White woman, I have been privileged in this society, as a student and a learner (McIntosh, 1989). I heed the warning of Dozono (2020), who critically examined the New York State global history framework, when he wrote, “Educators must always already be attentive to how power shapes discourse, even within our own attempts to counter the discourse of dominant powers” (p. 11). Some experiences impacting this research are the result of the collision between content I learned from professional development sessions, books, and other research with the prefabricated master narrative that is the backbone of the survey U.S. history course I was taught as a New York student and hired to deliver as a New York teacher. In addition, my interactions both teaching and learning from diverse students has inspired this work. The limitations stem from my background, as a great-grandchild of immigrants and the first to graduate college, and my experiences as a single teacher working in the largest school district in the United States, teaching high school social studies to roughly 2,500 students over the course of 17 years.

Research Design

The research interrogated the presentation of an objective history and an objective American narrative because that theoretical framework leaves little space for multiple

perspectives and a true contextualization of the United States as one of many nations in the world struggling for a more democratic society. Rather, if we approach American history as one that has been constructed, rather than one that simply “exists” as objective scholarship at face value, then we can move from a culturally irresponsible instruction to a culturally responsive pedagogy. In leaving the absolutist terminology behind, in leaving behind the concept of America as the supreme model of democracy, progress, and exceptionalism, we are permitting educators to confront the vulnerability of the American democratic experiment and to present that vulnerability to their students. This work is challenging because it is not only content based, as an examination of a math curriculum might be, but rather requires a complex reflection of our understanding of the story of the United States. As Rhodes (2021) phrased it, this requires “deprogramming... [to be] weaned off the nationalist stories of our youth” (p. 331).

In doing this work educators are creating a safe and equitable space for teachers and students to grapple with multiple perspective and form their own understandings, not just of where the United States has come from, but where the nation might be going. The study of American history is not just about the evolution of a democratic nation-state, but the course also demands a future focused component that rallies around a commitment to justice, democracy, and honesty. Increased teacher efficacy positively impacts student outcomes (Pantić, 2015), and in doing this research, I hope to continue the conversation for teachers to question and to contribute, and to increase teacher agency by inviting a critical reflection of, what has for so long been considered, standard content. In the conclusion of Dozono’s (2020) study of the global history framework in New York State, he reflected that, “We must acknowledge students’ multiple and shifting positionalities, allowing them to interpret history through their particular lens instead of directing them toward a ‘universal’ standpoint” (p. 22).

The master narrative cannot be dismantled in one study, but the recognition of its presence through the examination of a popular assessment, the U.S. History Regents exam, can contribute to the dialogue on the importance of critical history. According to Freire (1993), “Problem posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality” (p. 54), and students and teachers are both entitled to unveil and dissect how citizens understand their nation.

Data Collection

The documents for this study are the United States History and Government Regents Examinations which are issued by the New York State Education Department. The exams are delivered three times per year to school buildings in locked metal boxes the day before each administration date, three times per year. Soon after exam administration, usually within a few weeks, each exam is released on the state website, and therefore all exams were (and still are) freely available for this study. The website containing all the U.S. History Regents exams from 2001-2020 is <https://www.nysedregents.org/ushistorygov/home.html>.

Format of United States History and Government Regents Exam Structure from 2001-2020

The following is a brief overview of the three parts of the U.S. History Regents Exam.

Part I consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions arranged mostly in chronological order. It began with one or two questions focused on North America’s physical geography and continued with questions on developments from the 18th century. The content of the questions moves chronologically through the centuries until question 45 or 46. The final four or five multiple questions were not chronological. All multiple-choice questions provided four responses with one choice deemed “correct” and if selected, would earn a student full credit. Finally, some of the questions were accompanied by a document (e.g., image, text excerpt, chart,

graph) and others were not. Part II was one thematic essay prompt with themes such as foreign policy, constitutional change, reform movements, and geography. Part III consisted of one document-based essay prompt with mandatory short written response questions accompanying each document.

Review Process

Part I Selection

The Part I multiple-choice section featured content from a variety of historical developments across five centuries. This part was chosen for analysis because it recreated the curriculum in 50 multiple-choice questions¹, providing 2,850 questions across 57 exams for an in-depth examination of trends and patterns.

Data Collection

These exams are published on a website that is accessible to any internet user, therefore my data collection process involved an acquisition of one paper copy of each exam. Some exams I downloaded and printed from the NYSED website and other exams I already owned blank printed copies of due to years of teaching the Regents U.S. History course. I created a checklist and marked off every time I accessed a paper version from June 2001 to January 2020. There were a total number of 57 paper exams acquired for this research: three exams each for the 18 years of 2001 to 2019 (January, June, and August), two exams in 2001 (the debut exam in June and the second exam in August), and one exam in 2020. The final version of this U.S. History Regents format was administered in January 2020 just prior to COVID-19 shutting down schools

¹ The phrase *multiple-choice question* throughout the dissertation refers to the 50 multiple-choice prompts on any of the 57 exams. *Multiple-choice question* is the commonly used phrase amongst New York educators, although some questions are grammatically declarative sentences.

in New York. In June 2020, the Regents exam was due to change format completely, but the debut of this new format was delayed because of the pandemic. The checklist can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis: Methodological Frameworks

The central methodology for this research is a discourse analysis based on Fairclough's (2003) coding with analytical memos from Saldaña (2021). Discourse analysis, described in more detail below with other supporting frameworks, is connected to critical inquiry because Freire (1993) believed that dialogue as a teacher-student exchange (versus monologue as central pedagogy) was critical to a liberating education. One way that translates today is through the language used in mass produced texts, curriculum, resources, and exams that are designed for thousands and millions of students. To prevent perpetuating hegemonic, oppressive narratives, the dialogue must be multi-perspective with space for participation and critical interpretation. This research will exam the discourse to determine if there is space for dialogue as Freire (1993) intended.

The United States History and Government Regents exams tested material from the United States history survey course, which purported to include the primary history of the United States as a modern nation-state as well as the time from before the independence movement of 1776. Considering this vast scope, the 50 multiple-choice questions provided a clue as to which content was deemed most significant by New York State. Blount (2008) wrote about the importance of questions, clarifying that questions are critical because they “separate background noise from what we deem most important... they compel conscious movement” (p. 21). According to Dickens (2021) recontextualization in curriculum is inevitable, because we never reproduce the past without a present perspective as an orientation for that reproduction. In other

words, the reproduction of the past is never without interpretation or a lens from the historian (Litz, 1997; Villaverde et al., 2006). The question is, how can historians (along with curriculum and exam writers) expose their lenses, so students do not mistake the subjective for the objective? In his study of the New York State global history framework, Dozono (2020) noted in his conclusion that “The New York State framework fails to list authors, reinforcing the aura of scientific objectivity” (p.23). The same is true for the Regents exams.

Dickens (2021) and Recontextualization

Dickens (2021) wrote that there is a need to better understand the contribution of assessments in recontextualization, defined as “the transformations which occur to knowledge when it is ‘relocated’ (or, preferably, reconstructed) into pedagogic communication” (p. 693). Her study analyzing British history on standardized exams comprised part of the framework for this research. Dickens used problematic forms of knowledge recontextualization to analyze standardized assessments for 16-year-olds in an optional British history course with five categories of analysis: canonization, commodification, de-diversification, knowledge as static, and epistemic inconsistency. I used three of these categories in my evaluation and they are explained below.

Canonization. Despite the multiple perspectives that comprise the generation of historical narratives, canonization denotes a singular perspective as supreme. Canonization privileges one lens over another and pre-interprets meaning for students. History assessments might purport to engage students in multiple perspectives, as that is an important aspect of historical research. However, as Dickens noted in her study of British exams, multi-perspectivity was found to be side by side with a forced conceptual perspective, and the result is “overall epistemic inconsistency” (p. 698). In conclusion, with canonization some choices and decisions

of individuals and governments are exceptionized to ensure the patriotic, master narrative, is presented as the one true narrative. Documents and questions in the Part I multiple-choice section of the US History and Government Regents Exam were examined for canonization.

De-diversification. This is the inclusion and exclusion of certain events, people, and historical developments. Dickens found that White, male elites were overrepresented and non-elite actors were under-represented.

Adding to this finding, even when marginalized people are included, a hero history will highlight extraordinary contributions and experiences from select people in these groups. For example, Cesar Chavez's accomplishments appeared in multiple-choice questions on three out of 57 exams, but the oppression that ordinary Mexican immigrants endured was not woven throughout other developments, and the actors responsible for the oppression were also obscured.

Knowledge Made Static. Knowledge made static is the assumption that knowledge is fixed and figured out, that it is unchanged and unchanging. For example, Dickens (2021) wrote that calling the events from 1625-1660 the "English Revolution" (p. 702) relies on prior and uncritical interpretations. Specific to U.S. history is the assumption that knowledge is solved, and democracy is ever progressing, not regressing. The U.S. History Regents Exam was scrutinized for evidence that suggests a single, static interpretation of events by exploring excluded developments and using discourse analysis to better understand how included content was situated for students and teachers.

Villaverde et al.'s (2006) Framework to Investigate History

Villaverde et al. (2006) asked a pivotal question, "How can one investigate phenomena that have never been questioned or regarded as questionable?" (p. 314). They provided a framework of three methodologies to investigate history that has been assumed to be objectively

true for many years. The methodologies suggested are critical interpretation, meta-analysis, and asking unique questions (Villaverde et al., 2006). These criteria were incorporated into the framework for this study. Below is a description of each.

Critical Interpretation. This approach critically analyzes not only people and policies that are embedded in primary and secondary documents, but also “norms, beliefs, and values” (Villaverde et al., 2006, p. 315). In this way, historians are thinking about how the accepted norms or expectations might have been crafted to appear objective when they are in fact representative of one group’s subjective or relative experience. For example, Harris (1993) noted that Whiteness has been normalized in American law, writing that “the concept of whiteness-[was] established by centuries of custom (illegitimate custom but custom nonetheless) and codified by law” (p. 1728). Apple (2019) explained that early curriculum writers were motivated to preserve White values in the face of industrialization in the late 19th century and increased immigration to the United States outside of Northern Europe. Discourse analysis of included evidence combined with a discussion of excluded evidence was used for a critical interpretation of the materials presented in the U.S. History Regents exam.

Meta-Analysis. Meta-analysis is described as a “cornerstone of historiography” (Villaverde et al., 2006, p. 315), and asks what has been included and what has been excluded in historical narratives. It seeks a wholistic view in understanding the general narrative that results from the decision to include and exclude, particularly if those decisions are consistent over time. In this study, I searched for content that represented both dominant and marginalized voices in the multiple-choice questions. I looked for patterns among consistently included content that appears regularly on the exams.

Asking Unique Questions. Questioning is a way of making meaning of the world, a way of making connections between previously disconnected events, and a way to nurture curiosity. It also recognizes assumptions that were previously considered “‘natural’ or part of the ‘norm’” (Villaverde et al., 2006, p. 315). Such questions developed during the research period.

Data Analysis Process: Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis bridges close reading of texts and social theory (Fairclough, 2003). According to Fairclough (2003), critical discourse analysis asks questions about how societies both provide and deny people with possibilities and resources (p. 202). Education in the United States has been referred to as an equalizing experience (Darling-Hammond, 2010) yet this research deployed critical discourse analysis to determine how the language in Regents exams has favored one perspective. According to Fairclough (2003), “...text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts” (p. 3). It is a contextualized approach to understanding how developments are situated and what messages might be delivered through selection of events and use of grammar, like passive voice and plural pronouns.

Jóhannesson (2010) argued that historical discourse analysis is more than a methodology. Although the overall point in her article was to critique the research world’s “fetish on the methods rather than what is being studied” (p. 251), which she wrote straight away in the first paragraph of her article, she spent most of the body of the article detailing how discourse analysis is more of a research approach. Jóhannesson (2010) elaborated that discourse is a process with themes that emerge throughout the study of discourse, and that researchers must examine “what is silenced in the discourse” (p. 252). Her recognition is important to this study because discourse analysis will consider the role of included and excluded content in the

questions and responses in the Parts I multiple-choice section. Jóhannesson (2010) outlined three basic steps for discourse analysis which are to: 1) choose an issue; 2) decide on materials; and 3) begin with general, guiding questions at the start of the document analysis. Regarding step three, the researcher's questions expanded and evolved over time as the examination became more detailed and comprehensive (Villaverde et al., 2006). The need to specifically detail every question at the start the analysis is not productive, as long as, "...the reasons for conducting the research are clear, I recommend that the reader should simply start and let the actual ways of working and thinking about the material evolve during the process" (Jóhannesson, 2010, p. 256).

In the spirit of Jóhannesson's (2010) evolving questions, let us again state the reasons for this research, and these reasons serve as a summary of Chapter 2. The master narrative in United States history courses has favored a Western perspective that emphasizes progress, democracy, meritocracy, egalitarianism, and American exceptionalism. The narrative is grounded in an objective, positivist epistemology that presents the reality for some groups (usually privileged) as the reality for all groups. This perspective was the foundation of historical research for years until writers like Michael Foucault (Coloma, 2011) and Peter Novick (1988) shook that foundation in the second half of the 20th century. Despite continued efforts to include social history in the narrative of the United States (Symcox, 1999; Novick, 1988), or to include multiple perspectives in a post-modernist vision, the master narrative is still powerful enough to exist in seemingly objective spaces like curriculum frameworks (Dozono, 2020), and standardized high school exams. Novick (1988) wrote in 1988 that the "objectivist creed [has] remained remarkably enduring" (p. 2). Decades after Novick's observation, this research sought to understand how this sentiment still endures.

The New York State legislature committed to culturally responsive education when they passed the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework in 2019 (CRSE, 2019). Yet without a more complete understanding of how the master narrative previously existed in the curriculum (from 2001-2020), and how a singular perspective that embodies the master narrative and an objectivist approach might have been perpetuated through standardized exams, it could be difficult to execute this more culturally responsive framework as the state moves forward.

Quantitative Component

Maxwell (2013) stated that many qualitative studies have a quantitative component with “simple numerical results” (p. 128) obtained from the data. In Marino and Bolgatz’s (2010) study of state global history standards throughout the United States, their first level of analysis involved a tally of topics from the frameworks. “By cataloging the frequency of historical content, the analysis provides insight into what topics are deemed by the various states as most worthy of mention and most significant for students to learn” (p. 372). I applied this tally process with focus topics across the 2,850 questions on 57 Regents exams, which provided me with initial insight into which topics New York state deems most worthy in the history of the United States.

Close Read and Coding

Research from the documents were coded according to the guidelines from Saldaña (2021). In Dozono’s (2022) research on the global history framework in New York State, he used Saldaña’s (2021) coding framework by searching for patterns, repetitions, and relationships while looking for actions that were hidden through the passive voice. He understood grammar as “the rules and structures that shape relationships through speech” (Dozonzo, 2022, p. 6). My initial efforts to collect and make sense of the data were recorded on the printed exams. Saldaña

(2021) wrote, “There is something about manipulating data on paper and writing codes in pencil that gives you more control and ownership over the work” (p. 45). My coding was a combination of deductive and inductive, deductive because I started with codes that recognize exclusions of historical developments, such as *IPM* for Indigenous People missing. My coding was also inductive because I was “spontaneously creat[ing] codes the first-time data [was] reviewed” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 41). For example, after reviewing five exams I noticed that questions were phrased in a way that recognized geography as an agent of action but not humans themselves. This was not a data point that I had previously anticipated. Multiple-choice questions asked how geographic factors were responsible for “western settlement,” without recognizing the human agency that not only permitted but fostered the stealing of Indigenous land and murdering of Indigenous People through laws and corporate actions. Therefore, I used the code *Geo* for any question that obscured social actors in favor of a blameless “actor,” like the attraction of the Great Plains’ physical geography. I specifically used concept coding to categorize questions and responses in the multiple-choice because I sought to connect specific questions and response options to more abstract concepts, such as obscuring social actors or oppressions. Saldaña (2021) wrote that concept coding “stimulate reflections on broader social themes and ideas” (p. 153) and “become prompts or triggers for critical thought and writing” (p. 156). I read and reviewed 2,850 multiple-choice questions with concept coding because this type of coding is used in an effort to “transcend the local and particular of the study to more abstract or generalizable concepts” (Saldaña, p. 153, 2021), such as fostering a maser narrative. I coded the questions with the concept that fit based on the question itself, the correct response, or even one of the three incorrect responses. The codes acknowledged excluded content, for example *S* was the code for “the system of slavery is obscured.” Codes that interrogated included content were *V* which

means that the verb choice in the question obscured oppression. I then chose significant topics with patterns and trends and re-evaluated those questions, compiling their appearance on exams, codes, and memos in one place in order to evaluate the trends and patterns for Chapter 4.

The list of concept codes and their explanations can be found in Appendix B.

Questioning

The next layer of analysis included questioning. Below are general guiding questions that directed the close reading and analysis of 57 U.S. history Regents exams from 2001 to 2020. At this point in the research design phase, specific questions that framed the research based on the above criteria are articulated below.

Representational Point of View. I used Fairclough's (2003) representational point of view, explained as evaluating "which elements of events are included in the representation of those events, and which are excluded, and which elements that are included are given the greatest prominence or salience" (p. 136). Therefore, I asked:

Question 1. What content was consistently included in questions and prompts, such as people, places, experiences, locations?

Question 2. What content was excluded? According to Fairclough (2003), there are two types of exclusion of social actors: suppression – not in the text at all, and backgrounding-mentioned somewhere in the text but having to be inferred in one or more places (p. 145). This is a limitation of the study as the excluded content is a vast and insurmountable mountain of information that one person could never possibly deliver. However, there are well respected and cited bodies of work (Zinn, 2003; Loewen, 2007; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) that expose the significance of certain developments (redlining, coverture, Indigenous genocide) that were entirely absent and deserve to be recognized as excluded content.

Language and Oppression. Fairclough (2003) wrote about intransitive and transitive movement of goods. When goods move intransitively, it is almost like magic, because the people responsible for that movement are completely invisible from the language. A transitive movement of goods uses language to recognize the intentions of people responsible for the movement of goods. For example, intransitive language regarding the movement of natural resources from colonized lands to mother countries would say that “resources leave for other parts of the world” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 138). That phrase obscures the reality that sugar production, for example, was cultivated from enslaved labor and intentionally transferred to other areas of the world for the benefit of a mother country. Therefore, I asked:

Question 1. How are intransitive and transitive language used in the description of immigration, imperialism, slavery, and geography in the Part I multiple-choice questions?

Progress Narrative. The idea that the United States is steadily progressing towards expanded democracy and increased opportunity for all is an important part of American exceptionalism. Horsford and D’Amico (2015) charged Arne Duncan, former U.S. Secretary of Education, with using the “progress trope” (p. 865) when he referred to past educational inequalities in the United States as an aberration. As head of the Chicago public schools, Duncan closed schools in poor neighborhoods and expanded private charter schools (Ayers & Ayers, 2011). As stated earlier in this research, some think white supremacy is long erased from public schools because of their high school lessons on *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Focusing on the victories of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ignores the fact that, according to Harris (1993) in the *Harvard Law Review*, the “Court declined to guarantee white privilege would be dismantled” (p. 1751). Emphasizing *Brown’s* victories illustrates the power of the progress narrative in survey U.S. history courses.

Harris (1993) continued to state that the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* (1954) decision permitted “the reemergence of white supremacy in a more subtle form” (p. 1753), and these forms were absent from the survey U.S. history course.

In his review of the New York State global history framework, Dozono (2020) found that the framework covertly promotes “Westernization as the natural progression into a better modern future” (p. 9). This implies that Westernization is ever progressive and exempt from cyclical oppression and instability that is normally shown to encompass non-Western cultures. Therefore, I asked:

Question 1. How did the order and content of questions indicate a progressive, democratic, or conclusive narrative for the United States?

Question 2. When did the content in the question indicate a dominant point of view or exclude other points of view? Ayers and Ayers (2011) cited the importance of building students “capacity to name the world” (p. 104), but veiling oppression with euphemisms in the naming process contributes to the master narrative that preserves and justifies patriarchy or white supremacy. An example is using the term *westward expansion* to explain the stealing of Indigenous land in the 19th century (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014)

Question 3. When does the correct response to a question obscure other ways of interpreting the historical development in the question?

Limitations

Indeed, it is difficult to unwrap, to deconstruct the master narrative, and it is impossible for one teacher or one doctoral student to uncover all excluded content, or to accurately identify all the content pillars that construct the master narrative. As Villaverde et al. (2006) wrote, “...we must also accept the past will always be in part unknowable. If we fall prey to thinking it

is completely knowable by investigating the most minute section or detail after detail we enact a positivist approach to historiography and any other kind of study/ research” (p. 317). These limitations were recognized and mitigated as best as possible through research from diverse experts in the fields of American history and history education (Villaverde et al., 2006). In Brown and Au’s (2015) research into the master narrative of curriculum history, they too recognize that in a sea of excluded content, a researcher may only offer brief examples of historical developments and experiences that have been excluded.

Ethically, questioning the master narrative is an act of resistance in the United States. Book bans are increasing for stories that center around LGBTQ+ people, race, race relations, and the Holocaust, and LGBTQ+ teachers and students are under attack in some school districts (Gabbatt, 2022). In May of 2021, the Organization of American Historians published a statement on divisive concepts legislation. The organization is concerned for state level history educators, K-12 teachers, and students who are restricted by these bills that forbid the teaching of issues such as the systemic nature of racism and gender diversity. The organization wrote, “We denounce such bills as thinly veiled attempts to place limits on a curriculum which fosters a comprehensive and critical look at our history from a variety of perspectives” (National Coalition of Historians, 2021). According to the *Guardian*’s reporting in 2022, Jonathan Friedman, director of PEN America’s Free Expression and Education, stated that the “Challenges to books, specifically books by non-white male authors, are happening at the highest rates we’ve ever seen” (Gabbatt, 2022). Despite the conflict, the risks of challenging the master narrative should not deter researchers from questioning, investigating, and exposing the master narrative as it currently exists. The excluded content exists and has previously existed in contentious political spaces far from the classroom, in spaces that are beyond the control of the researcher

(Symcox, 1999; Apple, 2019; Adams et al., 2016). Yet researchers can closely examine and expand the understanding of how the curriculum, in this case through a standardized exam, is generating and preserving a master narrative.

Despite the myriad of limitations, as an educator for 17 years and an amateur historian in the field of United States history curriculum, I hope to generate a conversation through this research that seeks to understand patterns and trajectories in a traditional high school United States history survey course, and contribute to the discourse about what is missing, why it has been excluded, and how that exclusion has shaped the narrative. In writing about the nature of curriculum as both content that students are provided opportunities to investigate and content that is missing, Cherryholmes (1988) recognized that this concept might be critiqued because it includes everything, everything present in the curriculum and everything not present. But the lesson is in the value placed on the included content because that captures the focus of the students (Cherryholmes, 1988). Both included and excluded content dynamically interact and contribute to student learning, and in a United States history course, the learning, the discourse, the pillars of our past, all combine to conceptualize America as a nation-state in the modern world.

Delimitations: Selection of Timeframe for this Study

Researchers of history should disclose their selection process to their audience and explain their criteria (Villaverde et al., 2006). In June of 2020, the U.S. History Regents exam was due to change its structure again, however, administration of the new version was delayed for two years due to the shutdown of schools from the COVID-19 pandemic. The debut of the new version of the exam was again delayed in June 2022 due to the horrific mass shooting in Buffalo, New York in the spring of 2022 (Veiga, 2022).

The window of June 2001- January 2020 was the focus of this study. The structure of the exam, active from June 2001 to January 2020, is described in the sections above. I chose this window of exams because there was one consistent format for the three exams administered each year, and because, when this research began, it was the most recent format with 20 consistent years of documents. I chose not to review exams from prior to 2001 because the format was different, and I sought to remain consistent in my comparison of exams. In addition, locating every exam in the previous format would be time consuming and likely impossible, as the exams before 2001 are not in one central location accessible to the public nor are they digitally available. At the time of this publication, there had only been two exams published of the more recent version U.S. History Regents exam, one from June 2023 and one from August 2023.

Self-Reflexivity: Tracking the Intersection between the

Researcher and the Researched

Marginalia

To track my own thoughts and revelations as I read and analyzed the 57 exams, I used marginalia and journaling. Marginalia is the process of annotating written works as one is reading (Lessa et al., 2022). This was fitting because I utilized marginalia throughout my doctoral studies when reading books, journal articles, conference papers, and other dissertations. I did in fact print out every article from my classes to read because marginalia is my primary way of interacting with written texts. During my process description above, I revealed that I obtained printed versions of each exam, and one major reason was to write notes in the margins of the questions. I collected my significant thoughts, questions, and connections from the margins and compiled them into a journal. Marginalia captures initial thoughts and first reactions, it captures that “spark” as Lessa et al. (2022) called it, that moment where the reader is changed or moved

by the text. Journaling is a second layer, almost as a method of analyzing the sparks, after they have had time to process. These systems not only allowed me to reflect on my interaction with the documents as I was coding, but also served to guide my analytic memos.

Triangulation

To increase credibility, I also used a form of researcher triangulation, where “an outsider evaluator analyzes the data collected by the in-house evaluator and draws conclusions without knowing the insider’s interpretation. These conclusions are compared...” (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 243). To achieve these results, I solicited educators in the field to consider my study. This is an effort to gather other professional perspectives and conclusions, and to reflect on what I might have missed in the data. As a veteran educator in the largest school district in the United States, I am fortunate to have social studies colleagues teaching across districts in the New York City Department of Education. Many of these educators have taught the survey United States history course in New York State for over a decade and have scored hundreds of U.S. History Regents exams. The Regents exams have been a critical part of their professional careers and they were well suited to review this research and offer feedback.

Summary

In conclusion, this research examined the United States History and Government Regents exams from 2001-2020. The goal was to understand how the master narrative existed in these exams over time. The research used analysis frameworks from Dickens (2021), Villaverde et al. (2006), and Dozono (2022), with a discourse analysis framework from Fairclough (2003) and concept coding guidance from Saldaña (2006). The goal was to discover patterns through the repeated inclusion and presentation of certain content, such as the wording, phrasing, and situating of that content, and the consistent exclusion of other content. The process was carefully

recorded, always leaving space for new questions and lines of inquiry to emerge, and to challenge my own assumptions. Results of the research and analysis of the Part I multiple-choice sections from these 57 exams are organized and shared in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 - Presentation of Results

The purpose of this study was to understand how the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam positioned content in the Part I multiple-choice section and how that positioning crafted a narrative about the story of the United States. Concept coding (Saldaña, 2021) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) were used to evaluate exam questions and responses. The delimitations of the study included every U.S. History Regents exam administered from June 2001 until January 2020, excluding exams from before and after that time frame. This time frame represents a specific format of the exam described in Chapter 3.

Data Overview

I reviewed 57 Regents exams administered from June 2001 to January 2020 with a total of 2,850 multiple-choice questions. All exams are available in their entirety on this public access website: <https://www.nysedregents.org/USHistoryGov/home.html> (NYSED, 2022)

Assessing the Assessment

The New York State United States History and Government Regents exam assesses content from a curriculum spanning 400 years, beginning in the 17th century, and ending in the 21st century. For research in this dissertation, it would be impractical to analyze every historical development across the 2,850 multiple-choice questions. Therefore, another delimitation of this study is my choice to report on patterns and trends in the questions, the included content on the exam, as well as significant excluded topics. I analyzed, according to the framework by Villaverde et al.'s (2006), how norms have been crafted to appear objective and according to Dickens (2021) problematic recontextualization.

Results

Results of the data analysis are described below and revealed a combination of expected and unexpected findings. Reports include omitted content as well as discourse analysis of included content. Expected findings included terminology that favors a Western perspective, such as *Manifest Destiny*, and an exclusion of historical developments impacting diverse groups such as people descended from non-Western Europeans, LGBTQ+ people, and women. Unexpected findings revealed an emphasis on geography and climate to justify oppression, particularly with questions centering on plantations. Findings are divided into excluded and included topics, and the responses to the research questions are woven throughout the topics. The research questions are written again below.

Research Questions

How did the multiple-choice questions on the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam from 2001-2020 generate a narrative about the story of the United States?

- What patterns and trends were revealed in the included historical developments across the 57 exams?
- Did the language choices in both question formations and response options reflect a narrow perspective or assume a predetermined conclusion?
- Which critical historical developments were excluded entirely from the 2,850 questions?

Excluded Topics

Excluded topics that were discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation are described below. These topics did not appear in any of the 2,850 multiple-choice questions.

Indigenous People: Prior to 1492 and Contributions to the United States Constitution

The 50 multiple-choice questions in each exam were arranged in chronological order, suggesting that United States history, as per the New York State Regents exams, “begins” with questions one to five and “concludes” somewhere between question 45 to 50.

The first two to three questions on all 57 exams featured prompts centered on European settlement, Enlightenment, or colonialism. This included questions about European colonial settlements and economies from the 1600s, plantations, documents such as the Mayflower Compact and Declaration of Independence, or European philosophers like John Lock or Baron Montesquieu. This denoted a single lens to students that history began with Europeans and when Europeans arrived in North America.

Indigenous People Prior to European Arrivals

Exactly one out of 57 exams began with a question about Indigenous People’s lifestyles prior to European arrival. However, this question was aligned with a dominant perspective related to agriculture and read, “The development of a farming culture among pre-Columbian Native American Indians helped ensure [choice 4] a more stable food supply” (NYSED, 2022). The incorrect responses were all related to non-farming lifestyles of Indigenous People: [choice 1] “safety from neighboring tribes,” [choice 2] “the establishment of a nomadic lifestyle,” and [choice 3] “the continuation of hunting and gathering” (NYSED, 2022).

This question was the only one in 20 years that acknowledged the existence of Indigenous People as distinct from Europeans, and it still fostered a pro-agricultural lens, which pre-interpreted meaning for students. This falls under problematic recontextualization from Dickens’ (2021) framework.

Coverture

Coverture is a system of widespread and diverse oppressions that rendered women politically and economically dependent on their husbands upon marriage. The system of coverture was mentioned in zero questions across 57 exams. However, the issue of female political rights was highlighted in 22 out of 57 exams for a total of 22 multiple-choice questions.

Four of the multiple-choice questions, #17 from August 2002, #9 from January 2004, #13 from January 2008, and #12 from January 2017, recognized the disenfranchisement of women. The first identified Susan B. Anthony's strategy for suffrage to be civil disobedience and the other three noted the key proclamation from the Seneca Falls Convention was that all people are created equally. Zero questions mentioned the efforts of Alice Paul in securing the passage of the 19th Amendment in the 20th century. There were zero questions that acknowledged the elevated role of women in Indigenous societies. Likewise, not one question recognized the double oppressions African American women faced in their quest for suffrage, and no questions addressed efforts and accomplishments of any notable African American women such as Ida B. Wells or Shirley Chisholm.

Fifteen multiple-choice questions centered on the advancement of women's political rights, suffrage, suffrage in Western states prior to the passage of the 19th Amendment, or the 19th Amendment itself. Three questions asked about the Equal Rights Amendment, Title IX, and NOW (National Organization for Women).

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire was a horrific disaster in New York City resulting from employer abuse. Over 140 people perished in the Asch Building on March 25, 1911, mostly immigrant women who worked in restricted conditions behind locked doors. The owners were

more than neglectful, they purposely evaded safety measures for profit. In addition to the sheer tragedy of this event, the consequences of this fire were significant, leading to renewed commitment to labor rights and labor legislation. The fire is acknowledged on the Department of Labor's OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) website for its importance in United States labor history, noting that, "The Triangle factory fire remained the deadliest workplace tragedy in New York City's history until the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center 90 years later" (OSHA.gov, n.d).

The fire was excluded in its entirety from the 2,850 multiple-choice questions. There were zero questions centering on the causes, events, or impacts of this monumental event that connects to immigrant and labor history.

Supreme Court Cases

Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee (2010)

As discussed in Chapter 2 and revisited later in this chapter, this Supreme Court case was highly consequential because it reversed campaign finance reform laws and empowered the superrich. It is absent from all exams.

Shelby County v. Holder (2013)

This case gutted sections of the Voting Rights Act and was absent from all exams after its adjudication in 2013.

Redlining

This system, described in detail in Chapter 2, excluded African Americans from 30-year mortgages that became popular during the 1930s and helped build generational wealth for homeowners. There were 103 questions in 55 out of 57 exams that centered on President Roosevelt's New Deal. Most questions focused on providing relief for workers, specific

programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps or the Tennessee Valley Authority, or FDR's attempt to pack the Supreme Court.

Zero of the 103 questions asked about the practices or impacts of redlining.

The Firebombing of Japan during World War II

The strategy of firebombing was described in Chapter 2. Zero questions asked about the 67 Japanese cities firebombed during World War II.

LGBTQ+

There were zero questions that directly acknowledged experiences of any LGBTQ+ groups, including their fight for justice that gained national attention with the iconic Stonewall Riots, which occurred in the state of New York.

Included Topics

Included topics were evaluated with concept codes under the lens of critical interpretation (Villaverde et al., 2006) and recontextualization (Dickens, 2021). In the following included topics, I used discourse analysis and concept codes to deconstruct how the norm was crafted to appear objective. Dozono (2022) looked for patterns, repetitions, and relationships in his study of the New York State global history framework. Therefore, I chose the topics below to report for two reasons. First, they appeared consistently in the multiple-choice from 2001 to 2020 and second there were patterns and repetitions that appeared in the concept codes for each question in the topic.

Quantitative and qualitative information about each topic is discussed in distinct sections, organized by the appearance of the included content in the 50-question multiple-choice section of the U.S. History and Government Regents Exams. Quantitative information includes how many times either main topics or subtopics appeared. An example of a main topic is a question

about Executive Order 9066 and the internment of Japanese Americans during the 1940s, and a subtopic example is a question about Proclamation 4417 apologizing for the internment of Japanese Americans in 1976. To analyze qualitatively, I employed discourse analysis to interrogate the norms presented in the question, and this falls under the critical interpretation lens from Villaverde et al. (2006). I also discussed the canonization of a single lens (Dickens, 2021). Lastly, I included unique questions that arose according to the research from Villaverde et al.'s (2006) framework to investigate history.

18th Century Democratic Foundations

Each exam began with the 50-question multiple-choice set with two to five questions about democratic origins or European Enlightenment foundations. These questions centered around the Declaration of Independence, Virginia House of Burgesses, John Lock, the Mayflower Compact, the Articles of Confederation, or the Constitution. In the following examples, I interrogated the questions to ask, in the framework of Villaverde et al. (2006), how have the norms been crafted to appear objective? I also included my own questions that developed when analyzing these multiple-choice questions and embedded norms.

Declaration of Independence

Question #1 in June 2001 read, “According to the Declaration of Independence, governments are established to [choice 3] protect the natural rights of citizens” (NYSED, 2022). I coded this question with *Aud* because I considered the audience for this response. Which citizens were protected? The evidence is presented objectively, as if all citizens were protected, but in 1776 the government was established to not only protect but to foster prosperity among certain citizens at the expense of other citizens.

Question #1 in August 2005 stated, “One of the principles stated in the Declaration of Independence is that government should [choice 3] be based upon the consent of the governed” (NYSED, 2022). In analyzing this question, I asked, who were the governed that provided consent? The government was formed in the interest of Northern European descended land-owning men, not Indigenous People, women, or enslaved African Americans. This perspective is lost in the framing of the question.

The Virginia House of Burgesses

Question #2 in June 2015 presented a blank title for three parts of an outline: “A. Virginia House of Burgesses, B. Mayflower Compact, and C. New England town meetings” (NYSED, 2022). The question read, “Which title best completes the partial outline below [choice 1] developments of colonial self-government” (NYSED, 2022). Question #1 from January 2003 asked, “The Virginia House of Burgesses was important to the development of democracy in the thirteen colonies because it [choice 1] provided an example of a representative form of government” (NYSED, 2022).

For these questions I asked, a representative form of government for whom? Indigenous People and enslaved African Americans were not invited to participate and were not represented. This element of misrepresentation was absent from every question on government structures in British colonial North America.

John Locke

Question #3 in January 2007 stated “Which document included John Locke’s idea that people have the right to overthrow an oppressive government? [choice 3] Declaration of Independence” (NYSED, 2022). I asked, which people? Enslaved Africans did not have this right; therefore, they were excluded from the term *people* in this question.

The Constitution

The Three-Fifths Compromise. The exams centered the Constitution in 264 questions across 56 out of 57 exams. The Three-fifths Compromise, the clause embedding racial slavery into a system claiming to create a democratic society, was the focus in 11 of the 264 questions. These 11 questions approached enslavement as transactional at best and beneficial at worst. There was no recognition of the immorality and human rights violations perpetuated and legalized in this document.

For example, #6 in January 2018 stated that “counting three-fifths of the enslaved population” was “one way the original Constitution addressed the issue of congressional representation” (NYSESED, 2022). In this question, enslaving human beings fixed a problem.

In question #6 from June 2016, “An effect of the Three-fifths Compromise was that [choice 1] slave states gained additional representation” (NYSESED, 2022), enslaving people is justified as a *gain*. Number 8 in August 2012 bulleted a definition for bicameral legislature and a definition for three-fifths, “An enslaved person is counted as three-fifths of one person for purposes of both representation and taxation” (NYSESED, 2022). The question was, “These two statements describe [choice 3] compromises reached by the Constitutional Convention” (NYSESED, 2022). A compromise implies meeting in the middle, but a question in the framework of Villaverde et al. (2006) is, compromised by which groups? There is no middle ground for enslaving and violating human rights, and enslaved Americans were not invited to negotiate on this compromise.

In January 2011, #7 stated that the Three-fifths Compromise resolved a conflict and #6 in August 2001 that the Three-fifths Compromise was “a solution to the problem of how to determine the number of representatives in the House from each state” (NYSESED, 2022). With all

the positive connotations the verb *resolved*, and the noun *solution* generate, these questions concealed the inhumanity of a clause that violated the very principles the Constitution was supposedly founded upon. This question focused students' attention on the mathematical *problem* of representation amongst European descended males and obscured the actual moral problem which was the expanding and permanent enslavement of men, women, and children.

Campaign Finance

The issue of expensive campaign costs impacting American democracy was the center of four multiple-choice questions in 2002, 2003, 2008, and 2018. Three questions featured cartoons critiquing high campaign costs in January 2002, June 2003, and January 2018 (NYSED, 2022). The questions for all three cartoons were the same, “What is the main idea of the cartoon?” (NYSED, 2022). The answer for January 2002 was “Additional limits on campaign spending are needed,” and June 2003, “High campaign costs negatively affect the political process” (NYSED, 2022). The January 2018 cartoon was from 1950 and it showed men fiddling around Senate seats with labels on their chest read: “private interests” and “huge campaign funds” (NYSED, 2022). The correct response was “Special interest groups often influence elections” (NYSED, 2022). The final question without a cartoon document was from January 2008. It asked, “In the late 1990s, increasing public concern about the role of money in politics led to [choice 3] attempts to reform campaign financing” (NYSED, 2022). These prompts centered questions and answers around the concerning influence of high campaign costs.

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Citizens United versus Federal Election Committee* (2010) was a critical Supreme Court case that permitted unlimited spending on campaigns with a 5-4 decision. Jane Meyers detailed the struggle to maintain integrity in public elections through court battles, contribution limits from Congress, and tax evasion scandals throughout the 20th century

(Meyers, 2017). Meyers (2017) reported that the ultra-wealthy, the top 1% of the 1% are impacting elections as “the country’s political gatekeepers” (p. 408) because of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee* (2010) decision.

Even though the Regents exam generally confronted issues around election integrity and campaign finance, this critical Supreme Court case that changed the landscape of elections was absent from the U.S. History Regents exams. This is an example of excluded content leading to de-diversification, a problematic recontextualization according to Dickens (2021).

The Great Plains and the Louisiana Purchase

Multiple-choice questions and responses tended to foster a patriotic narrative (Dickens 2021) across a wide array of topics. There were 39 multiple choice-questions centered on the European and United States conquest of the Great Plains known as the Louisiana Purchase, including four that focused on the Mississippi River and Port of New Orleans. Like Dozono (2022), I looked for patterns in the questions and noticed that all fostered a complimentary perspective of the federal government, with topics such as benefits to the U.S. government, Jefferson’s grappling with loose and strict constructionism, geographic significance in terms of control off the Mississippi River and Port of New Orleans, doubling the size of the United States, or the Great Plains as potential farmland. All the correct responses were oriented around benefits of and for European descended settlers at the expense of Indigenous People, and yet this facet is entirely excluded from the questions.

Zero of the 39 Louisiana Purchase multiple-choice questions acknowledged the Indigenous People who lived on the land prior to and after European settlement and who would consequentially be removed from that land. This aspect was omitted, which is an example of de-diversification from Dickens (2021) and a contribution to a meta-analysis that favors the United

States government and the United States nation-state (Villaverde et al., 2006). The questions were framed from a Western perspective, with the United States purchasing from the nation-state of France and benefits belonging to European descended settlers. For example, in June 2010, question #11 stated “The Louisiana Purchase (1803) was a foreign policy success for the United States primarily because it: [choice 2] ended French control of the Mississippi River” (NYSED, 2022). The incorrect choices were also Eurocentric, with no mention of Indigenous People.

There were no connections in any questions between the purchase of the land and its role as the future relocation area for east coast Native American tribes decades later. By excluding Indigenous People entirely from these questions, it purports a position that Indigenous People were invisible, and this land was acquired legitimately.

Indigenous People

Indigenous People were missing from a variety of topical questions. As stated in previous sections of Chapter 4, there were no questions that acknowledged Indigenous democratic practices, no Louisiana Purchase questions that centered around the loss of land for groups like the Sioux or Arapaho, and no questions that connected the Louisiana Purchase to the Indian Removal Act. These questions instead focused on benefits for White farmers in the Ohio River Valley and the Great Plains.

There were 16 questions across 16 exams that used the phrase *Manifest Destiny* to whitewash the forced removal, loss of land and life, and cultural destruction of Indigenous People resulting from the expansion of United States borders westward, beyond the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, and finally the Pacific Ocean. Two questions, from August 2014 and January 2015 used paintings to illustrate the concept of *Manifest Destiny*. The painting from Brooklyn artist John Gast in August 2014 depicts Indigenous People confronting the loss of their

land; that aspect of the painting is not acknowledged in the associated question. Most of the questions connected *Manifest Destiny* with the “Mexican War,” (the violent conflict the United States waged against Mexico in 1846), or the “acquisition” of Texas and California, or “expansion to the Pacific Ocean” (NYSED, 2022). Number 11 in January 2017 asked students to choose a quote that best represented *Manifest Destiny*, and the correct choice was, “The United States has a duty to spread ideals westward” (NYSED, 2022), which fostered a patriotic narrative exclusive of and at the expense of Indigenous People. It implied that Indigenous People are invisible in the United States. All maps portraying human-made borders of North America were labeled with political boundaries from either Great Britain, such as the Proclamation of 1763, or the United States, such as the “Mexican Cession” (NYSED, 2022). The invisibility of Indigenous People on North American maps generated a single lens (Dickens, 2021) and sustained the myth that Indigenous People were not deserving of their land. It erased them from the historical narrative. Omitting Indigenous People from these maps perpetuated a norm of inevitable U.S. expansion as an objective truth, when in fact the stolen land resulted in a domino effect of losses explained best by Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), “When colonizing powers seized Indigenous trade routes, the ensuing acute shortages, including food products, weakened populations and forced them into dependency on the colonizers, with European manufactured goods replacing Indigenous ones” (p. 41).

The Homestead Act or Pacific Railway Act were featured in the multiple-choice sections of 15 exams. Most questions centered on the purpose of the acts using the following language for correct responses, “free land to settlers in the West, encouraging Western settlement, encouraging settlement of the Great Plains, providing free land to farmers” (NYSED, 2022). One question acknowledged Indigenous People in a way that communicated and accepted the

inevitability of their losses. Number 17 in June 2009 asked, “The Homestead Act, the mass killing of buffalo, and the completion of the transcontinental railroad are most closely associated with the [choice 4] decline of the Plains Indians” (NYSESED, 2022). *Decline* is a passive, intransitive term that signaled an expected progression of events, it absolved the actors who confiscated the land for farming and railroads, and the resulting death and destruction of Indigenous People and culture.

Questions centering on Andrew Jackson euphemized Indigenous removal policies. For example, #12 in January 2015 stated that “Andrew Jackson supported the Indian Removal Policy because [choice 1] white settlers desired the land on which Native Americans lived” (NYSESED, 2022). Both terms *supported* and *desired* signaled endorsement of White settlers stealing land from Indigenous People, despite the principle of respect for private property the United States was supposedly founded upon. The terms hide the racism, cruelty, and, as described by Dunbar-Ortiz “genocidal violence” (p. 100) that these Jackson policies perpetuated.

There were 16 questions that focused on Indigenous experiences in the 18th century. These questions centered on assimilation with a neutral tone. For example, a question in January 2015, showed two photographs of children wearing Indigenous clothing and then European clothing, and asked, “The pair of photographs suggests the purpose of the Carlisle Indian School was to [choice 4] promote cultural assimilation” (NYSESED, 2022). The verb *promote* denoted a desirable experience and concealed the corporal punishment these children experienced as well as the white supremacist assumptions underpinning assimilationist schools.

Plantations

There was a total of eight multiple-choice questions on eight exams that focused a single lens (Dickens, 2021) on the geography and economy of British Southern colonies in North

America. All questions connected the geography of warm, humid temperatures and fertile soil to an economically successful plantation economy.

Six of these questions failed to acknowledge the labor of enslaved people in the development of plantations, and rather contributed their production entirely to the neutral topic of physical location. For example, question #1 from June 2017 read, “Which geographic feature most influenced the development of a large plantations in the Southeast region of the United States? [choice 4] fertile lowlands” (NYSESED, 2022).

In #9 from August 2001, the question read “In which section of early 19th-century America was the plantation system an important feature?” with the correct response being “the South” (NYSESED, 2022). This question obscured the violation of rights and enslavement of human beings with the terminology *plantation system*. It also covertly approved of this system by labeling it *important*.

Question # 3 from January 2015 asked, “Which factor most influenced the economic development of the colonial South? [choice 2] warm and wet growing seasons” (NYSESED, 2022). This question highlighted climate as the most influential factor. This is an example of de-diversification (Dickens, 2021), because it ignored the people enslaved and laboring in the fields during the warm and wet growing seasons to make the land economically productive for the planting class.

Question #11 from August 2008 read, “The climate and topography of the Southeastern United States had a major impact on the history of the United States before 1860 because the region [choice 4] provided agricultural products that were processed in the North and in Europe” (NYSESED, 2022). In this question, the word *region* obscured the system of slavery. The *region* did not *provide* agricultural products, but rather millions of people trapped in enslavement

cultivated these agricultural products. Similarly, in January 2005, question #1 stated that “Because of fertile land and a long growing season, plantations in the 13 colonies developed in [choice 3] the South” (NYSESED, 2022), thus concealing the stolen land from Indigenous People and the system of enslavement that fostered the plantation economy.

Question #1 in June 2018 clearly asked, “What was a main reason large plantations developed in the South?” [choice 4] The climate in the South provided longer growing seasons” (NYSESED, 2022). The question sanitized white supremacy, racism, and enslavement. It shifted students’ attention to climate and away from the fact that large plantations developed because people were enslaved to labor in the fields and produce crops such as rice, cotton, and tobacco for the profits of others. This singular focus on geography is an example of fostering a patriotic narrative in Dicken’s (2021) canonization category of recontextualization.

Immigration and Nativist Language

Thirty-eight out of the 57 exams featured 44 multiple-choice questions that centered around nativism, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924. Nativism in the United States is a xenophobic belief that White, Northern European descended Christian folks are native to and deserving of their place in the United States. Nativists believed in their superiority over immigrants who were not from Northern and Eastern Europe. Okrent (2019) quoted a Washington Post editorial from 1906 to capture the sentiment, “90% of Italians coming to the United States were ‘the degenerate spawn of the Asiatic hordes which, long centuries ago, overran the shores of the Mediterranean’” (p. 99).

Even though some of the newer immigrants at the turn of the 20th century were arriving from the European continent, they were perceived as lesser than Northern Europeans, and the

concept of Whiteness was defined as Northern and Western European ancestry. On the colorism scale they were not a light enough, desirable shade of white to be considered *American* by the nativists. Okrent (2019) cited an Alabama court case that absolved a Black man from miscegenation laws after he married a Sicilian woman because, according to the court, ““The mere fact that the testimony showed this woman came from Sicily can in no sense be taken as conclusive evidence that she was therefore a white woman”” (p. 281).

The nativist multiple-choice questions centered around several issues; the results are described in the sections below.

Immigration and Labor

Some questions asked about the 19th century factory owners welcoming unlimited immigration and profiting from their cheap factory labor. One question from June 2008 asked, ““Until the early 20th century, few restrictions on immigration to the United States existed primarily because [choice 1] industry needed an increasing supply of labor”” (NYSED, 2022). However, in the 20th century, the questions flipped. A chart on the January 2008 exam showed numbers of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe in comparison to Southern and Eastern Europe, both before and after the 1921 and 1924 Quota Acts. The question accompanying the chart asked, ““One reason for the passage of the laws shown in this chart was to [choice 2] protect the jobs of workers in the United States”” (NYSED, 2022). The verb *protect* denoted a positive, benevolent motivation for the Quota Acts, and obscured the white supremacist attitudes that generated their creation, an example of Dickens (2021) canonization.

Location and Geography

Questions asked students to define *new immigrants* as being from Southern and Eastern Europe and *old immigrants* as being from Northern and Western Europe. For example, #26 in

August 2018 stated, “During the 1920s, Congress established a quota system for immigration in order to [choice 3] reduce immigration from southern and eastern Europe” (NYSESED, 2022).

Number 6 in January 2005 stated “The ‘new immigrants’ to the United States between 1890 and 1915 primarily came from [choice 1] southern and eastern Europe” (NYSESED, 2022).

These geographic distinctions were presented as value free on the exam, when at the time the perception of folks outside of Northern and Western Europe as being inferior people motivated federal legislation against their entry into the United States.

Nativism and the Ku Klux Klan

Three of the 35 exams with nativist multiple-choice question linked nativism to the growth of the Ku Klux Klan. These three questions appeared in August 2005, June 2017, and January 2019. Number 28 in June 2017 read, “During the 1920s, members of the Ku Klux Klan were closely associated with [choice 2] promoting nativist ideas and policies” (NYSESED, 2022). Number 27 in August 2005 asked, “The influence of nativism during the 1920s is best illustrated by [choice 4] growth of the Ku Klux Klan” (NYSESED, 2022). And finally, #30 in January 2019 asked, “During the 1920s, the influence of the Ku Klux Klan and the passage of laws setting immigration quotas illustrated [choice 4] growth of nativism” (NYSESED, 2022). The terms *growth* and *promoting* in the answer choices and the word *influence* in the question exuded a positive connotation, despite the violent racist ideology of the Ku Klux Klan. This is also an example of knowledge-made-static (Dickens, 2021) because the exam recognized a national and notorious hate organization while still excusing the impacts of its ideology.

Additionally, the connections between the white supremacist beliefs that permeated White, middle-class society in the 1920s and nativism were not clearly articulated in the exam, particularly when questions connect government policy to nativism. For example, #27 in June

2011 asked, “Which developments most clearly illustrates the nativist attitudes that existed in the United States in the 1920s? [choice 1] limits on immigration established by the quota acts” (NYSED, 2022). This question obscured members of Congress in adopting and legalizing white supremacist claims to keep out individuals from some areas of the globe, while continuing to permit immigration from Northern and Western Europe.

Sacco and Vanzetti

The murders of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were connected to nativism, and the ruthlessness of their execution was obscured and lumped together with other “cultural clashes.” Five exams out of 57 included Sacco and Vanzetti, such as #25 in June 2013, which stated, “The Scopes trial and the Sacco and Vanzetti case both involved [choice 2] clashes over cultural values” (NYSED, 2022). The 1925 Scopes trial involved a biology teacher who was prosecuted for teaching evolution in a Tennessee public school. The trial was sensational and publicly salient, with Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan hired as litigators and extensive newspaper coverage. However, the punishment for John Scopes was a fine. Sacco and Vanzetti were found guilty and denied a re-trial even after professional criminals confessed to the murder for which they were accused of. Sacco and Vanzetti were brutally executed by electric chair. These two cases were filed together as *clashes of cultural values* in one short multiple-choice question. Yet the cultural values that lead to Scopes’ conviction were about religious beliefs and science. The *cultural values* that lead to Sacco and Vanzetti’s conviction and death included xenophobia, bigotry, hatred, and white supremacy; *values* that had permeated a fair justice system supposedly guaranteed to all Americans. Another question in June 2015 stated that, “In the 1920s, controversies over Prohibition, the National Origins Act, and the Scopes trial all reflected disagreement over [choice 2] cultural values” (NYSED, 2022). The

National Origins Act was linked to white supremacy, and on these exams, white supremacy was coded as a *value*. This is an example of knowledge-made-static (Dickens, 2021) because the exam is perpetuating oppressive perspectives from decades ago.

Nativism and Anglo-Saxon Superiority

The closest admission to white supremacy appeared in two multiple-choice questions, #24 in August 2005 and #43 in January 2009. These two questions each included “Belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority” and “The Anglo-Saxon civilization is the best in the world” as a factor among others in an outline (such as a desire for new markets, creation of a modern navy, and United States missionaries spreading Christian principles). Both questions asked about an appropriate title for the outline and both responses were related to imperialism, “Factors Supporting United States Imperialism” in January 2009 and “Justification for American Imperialism in August 2005 (NYSED, 2022).

Two questions out of 2,850 connected Anglo-Saxon superiority, essentially white supremacism, to United States policy. And in both questions the terminology in the correct choices, the verb *supporting* and the noun *justification*, served to legitimize the motivation for the policies of United States imperialism.

Nativism: America is for Americans

Finally, question #19 in August 2011 asked, “Which statement best expresses a common belief among nativists in the late 1800s and the early 1900s?” (NYSED, 2022). The choices were “(1) Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, (2) The streets are paved with gold (3) All immigrants strengthen America and (4) America is for Americans” (NYSED, 2022). Choice 4 was deemed correct. The use of the word *American* in this 1920s nativist slogan is without any qualifier such as Christian American, Anglo-Saxon American, suggesting that whoever was

exhibiting prejudice through nativism was the genuine *American*. This quote from 19th century nativists perpetuated those exclusive parameters of who is American, which was predominantly people that claimed Northern European ancestry.

Here in another example of knowledge-made-static (Dickens, 2021), the exam continued this racist assumption in the language used to craft questions about nativism.

Negative American Attitudes. Number 25 in January 2006 stated, “The Red Scare, the National Origins Acts of the 1920s, and the verdict of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial are an example of negative American attitudes towards [choice 1] immigrants” (NYSESED, 2022). The phrasing *negative American attitudes* without clarifying which types of Americans held these attitudes, contributes to the assumption that Anglo-Saxon attitudes about race are legitimate and genuinely American. Unlike ethnic minorities these Americans were not designated with any qualifiers in the question, such as *negative attitudes from nativist Americans*. The people who held these beliefs were simply referred to as, *Americans*. This qualification also categorizes hatred and xenophobia as an *attitude*.

Which Immigrants? Question #14 in August 2004 asked, “The Gentlemen’s Agreement, literacy tests, and the quota system were all attempts by Congress to restrict [choice 1] immigration” (NYSESED, 2022). Which immigrants were restricted? Another correct choice about the immigration acts from August 2011 was that “too many immigrants were coming into the country” (NYSESED, 2022). Again, I ask the question from Villaverde et al.’s (2006) framework, which immigrants? The 1920s quota laws were not intended to objectively restrict sheer numbers of immigrants, they targeted groups of people based on ethnicity. Those factors were excluded from these questions and thus recontextualized under the category of de-diversification (Dickens, 2021).

Chinese Exclusion Act

The Chinese Exclusion was the first United States law to articulate a limitation on immigration based on race and class. Five multiple-choice questions included the Chinese Exclusion Act. Two connected the act to nativism. Question #21 listed three bullet points: 1. Chinese Exclusion Act, 2. Gentleman’s Agreement, and 3. Emergency Quota Act (1921). The question stated, “These federal actions demonstrate that Americans have [choice 4] favored limiting immigration at different times in the nation’s history” (NYSESED, 2022). A question I asked was, which Americans favored the limitation? And, which immigrants were limited? Question # 21 concealed the critical racial underpinnings of the act. One question acknowledged racism in policy. Question #16 quote the Chinese Exclusion Act and asked, “Passage of this legislation was mainly a response to [choice 1] economic and race-based opposition to immigrants in the western United States” (NYSESED, 2022).

In connection with Chinese American relations, there were 11 questions centered on the Open-Door policy, all using language such as equal access to markets, securing access to markets, gaining access to Chinese markets, or protecting U.S. trading interests in China. Further analysis of these questions is discussed in Chapter 5.

United States in the Western Hemisphere

Monroe Doctrine and Spanish American War

The Monroe Doctrine was featured in 12 multiple-choice questions. Many questions asked about the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine and responses were European focused. For example, the correct response to the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine in August 2007 and August 2011 was “[choice 1] limit European influence in the Western Hemisphere” (NYSESED, 2022).

Colonial Language. Four questions used *colony* in their response to emphasize the desire of the United States to prevent colonization. The correct response in June 2015 was “prevent former colonial powers from taking over Latin American nations,” January 2011, “opposed the creation of new colonies in Latin America” and January 2018, “prevent further European colonization in the Western Hemisphere” (NYSED, 2022).

In United States history courses, colonial language is associated with Britain ruling North America and the fight for freedom in the American Revolution. Interestingly, the exam used colonial language to emphasize instances where the United States theoretically aimed to prevented colonization, such as with the Monroe Doctrine. However, when the United States was the nation-state claiming colonies, such as after the Spanish American War, there was no such language used. Four of the nine questions on the Spanish American War focused on the United States as a world power. The correct response in January 2017 asking about the result of the Spanish American War was that the United States “[choice 2] gained recognition as a world power” (NYSED, 2022). The term *gained recognition* covertly applauded imperial conquests. Question #19 in January 2017 used bullets to summarize US imperialism in the 1900s. One bullet, “Puerto Rico becomes a U.S. territory” utilized the verb *becomes* to disguise this conquest in, as Dozono (2022) wrote, a passive voice.

The United States conquest of Mexico was referenced in eight exams (NYSED, 2022). In three questions, general terms like “expanding the United States to the Pacific Ocean” (NYSED, 2022) were used. In five questions, Mexico was mentioned directly and the 1846 war was connected to the term *Manifest Destiny* with phrases like “acquiring territory from Mexico” in June 2010 (NYSED, 2022). *Acquiring* is a passive verb that neutralizes the violent initiation of this conflict and imperial intentions of the United States government. The perspectives of

Mexican and Indigenous People in what is today the southwestern United States were entirely absent from these questions.

Panama Canal

There were four questions focused on the Panama Canal. Two of them justified the canal as a necessary passage for the United States navy. The other two questions, from June 2010 and June 2018, centered on the same cartoon, which featured an oversized President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt scooping dirt from the canal site and dumping the debris onto Bogotá, Columbia. This cartoon was clearly an anti-imperial critique of Roosevelt’s policy, and significant as the only critical judgement of United States relations with Latin America in the Part I multiple-choice section. This discovery is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Latino/Latina People in the United States

There were four questions in 2,850 that acknowledged the experiences of some Latino/a people within the borders of the United States, and they were all relegated to farm work and correcting injustice. Three questions centered on Cesar Chavez organizing workers and leading them to improved labor conditions. Number 43 from January 2013 asked about the impact of a “Boycott Lettuce and Grapes” poster, with the correct response praising public acceptance of humane treatment of farm workers, “[choice 4] public support for the goal of farmworkers increased” (NYSED, 2022).

The Internment of Japanese Americans: Executive Order 9066 and *Korematsu v. United States* (1944)

Executive Order 9066 was issued by President Roosevelt in February 1942. This order forced over 100,000 (National Archives, 2021) American citizens of Japanese descent out of their homes and into relocation camps. Evacuees lost their houses, belongings, savings,

businesses, professional licenses, entire communities, pets, and more, in addition to the profound emotional and mental trauma.

Executive Order 9066 and Korematsu v. the United States (1944)

There were 29 out of 57 exams with 31 multiple-choice questions centered on either Executive Order 9066 or *Korematsu v. the United States* (1944) (NYSESED, 2022).

Twenty-seven out of 31 focused the language of the question around moving or interning Japanese Americans, necessity of limiting civil liberties, Japanese Americans as a security threat, or justifying the Executive Order due to fear of an invasion. For example, question #34 from June 2004 stated, “During World War II, many Japanese Americans living on the West Coast were relocated to detention centers primarily because they [choice 2] were seen as a security threat” (NYSESED, 2022). Question #38 from August 2003 asked, “Which federal policy was enacted during World War II and justified as a wartime necessity? [choice 2] internment of Japanese Americans” (NYSESED, 2022). And question #35 in the August 2015 exam stated, “The relocation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II occurred because [choice 4] military authorities considered them a threat to national security” (NYSESED, 2022). These questions centered tens of thousands of American citizens as a justifiable problem for the federal government and military to solve. Question # 37 from January 2002 included a quote from Justice Black from the *Korematsu v. United States* (1944) decision (NYSESED, 2022). The question asked, “Which generalization is supported by this quotation?” (NYSESED, 2022). The correct response was choice 3, “Individual rights can be restricted under certain circumstances” (NYSESED, 2022). I used the *Aud* and *WS* concept codes for this question to inquire about the intended audience and understand how white supremacy was obscured. Which individual rights were referenced in the correct response? The rights of nonwhite Americans were restricted in the

most extreme way, approved by two branches of the federal government over three years. By simply writing *individual rights*, this question glossed over the white supremacist ideology that contributed to Executive Order 9066 and the *Korematsu v. United States (1944)* decision and suggested that this event occurred only because of the war circumstances. The way in which these events were recontextualized in the U.S. History Regents exam are an example of how norms (the oppression of nonwhite Americans) are made to appear objective. Another example is in question #25 of August 2004, which asked about the power of the president to “limit a group’s civil liberties,” without clarifying which group (NYSED, 2022).

Proclamation 4417 and Restitution

There were zero questions out of 31 that referenced Proclamation 4417 from President Ford, when he officially apologized for the internment camps.

There was one question out of 31, #45 from the June 2010 exam, which centered around acknowledgement of wrongdoing. This question included George Bush’s 1990 letter of restitution payments to interned and descendants of interned Americans.

Racial Prejudice

There were four questions that recognized racial prejudice or morality as a factor in Executive Order 9066, question #31 in January 2006, #45 in June 2009, #31 from January 2017, and question #37 from June 2019. (These examples are evaluated in Chapter 5).

The Interstate Highway Act

There were 10 questions on 10 exams centered on the Interstate Highway Act. All questions presented the positive impacts of these highways as universal and critical to the development of suburban communities. For example, question #35 in August 2010 asked, “Which development resulted from the construction of the interstate highway system? [choice 1]

increased suburbanization” (NYSESED, 2022), #47 in June 2013 stated, “The growing use of the automobile in the 1920s and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 both contributed to [choice 3] the growth of suburbs” (NYSESED, 2022), and #37 in August 2019, “One important effect of President Eisenhower’s proposal for interstate highways was a significant increase in [choice 2] suburban communities.” In August 2013, #39 asked, “Which development was a major result of the 1956 Interstate Highway Act? [choice 2] migration to the suburbs” (NYSESED, 2022).

The correct responses reflected the experience for some Americans, while involuntary movement of people in neighborhoods destroyed by highways was not included. Zero questions acknowledged the racial constructs of the highways that connected to redlined maps from the New Deal era, cut through Black business, destroyed Black homes, and cut-off Black communities from surrounding areas (“The Negative Impacts of the Interstate Highway Act”). Some exam questions, like # 48 in January 2017 or # 27 in January 2016, acknowledged Black migration from Southern parts of the United States to northern parts, the pattern of movement called the *Great Migration*. However, these questions did not include any reference to forced or local movement of Black Americans because of highways cutting through their neighborhoods, sometimes intentionally as Archer (2020) wrote, “Often under the guise of ‘slum removal,’ federal and state officials purposely targeted Black communities to make way for massive highway projects” (p. 1265).

Summary

The research discovered several ways multiple-choice questions on the U.S. History Regents exam omitted historical developments in their entirety and obscured or silenced multiple perspectives from the most popular developments, such as the issuance of Executive Order 9066, women’s rights, suburban developments, or the evolution of plantation slavery. The exam used

the terms *Americans* or *Southern states* without clarifying the specific group being referenced, which serves to silence marginalized folks while legitimizing others. People demonstrating oppressive positions did not require a qualification to be *American*; according to these questions, they simply were American. Additionally, American *values* were used as umbrella terms to justify and normalize racially exclusive or xenophobic policies, including the injustice in a criminal case that led to state sponsored executions. Interpretations of topics are explained in distinct sections of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 - Interpretations, Conclusions, Recommendations

The research findings indicate a deficit of perspectives across the multiple-choice sections of the New York State United States History and Government Regents exam. Excluded historical developments silenced the voices of people oppressed under legal systems that disadvantaged minority groups and women. Included developments from major topics such as immigration, democratic practices, and the institution of slavery were sanitized to favor a progressive narrative, one that omits or forgives anti-democratic actions. This sanitization was subtle to varying degrees, sometimes using overarching general nouns to omit oppression like *people* as in all people benefitted from a development, sometimes using nouns and verbs like *support* or *values* to conceal imperial motives, and sometimes justifying egregious human rights violations.

The conclusion from the research is that the culminating, high stakes assessment taken by most New York State high school juniors from 2001 until 2020 was aligned with the master narrative and not culturally responsive curriculum standards. This is important because, as stated in Chapter 1, New York State committed to culturally responsive education in 2019 with the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework. Assessing and understanding culturally destructive practices in the past is essential to cultivating a more responsive curriculum in the future.

The schematic narrative template of the United States is closely aligned to the enlightened values written into the foundational documents of the 18th century. The interpretations of these documents focus on their general meaning as opposed to the exclusivity of their execution in the 18th century and beyond. Exam questions were not written from the perspectives of people excluded from democratic rights and principles. The people relegated to

the bottom of the hierarchy were not only invisible on this exam, but their oppressions were found to be justified in the framing of questions and responses.

A detailed discussion of specific research topics from Chapter 4 can be found below.

Historical Developments by Topic

18th Century Democratic Foundations

The English first established a permanent settlement in North America in the 17th century. The topics of any questions prior to or during the 1600s were focused on Europe and European experiences, particularly England. Experiences of people native to North America were absent. For example, question #1 in June 2019 asked about the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights, while there were no questions on Indigenous practices and politics. This permutation of questions suggested to students that history, culture, and progress began in Europe. It is also a powerful signal communicating the legitimacy of the United States as a nation-state from the 18th century onward.

Questions about government systems denoted a positive trajectory. For example, #6 in August 2007 wrote, “The United States Constitution corrected a weakness in the Articles of Confederation by [choice 3] granting Congress sole control over interstate and foreign commerce” (NYSED, 2022). Question #2 in June 2012 asked a similar question, but the language read, “The writers of the Constitution corrected an economic weakness under the Articles of Confederation when they [choice 1] granted Congress the power to levy and collect taxes” (NYSED, 2022). These questions emphasized corrective action from one government, the Articles of Confederation, to the next, the Constitution.

Yet the final government, the Constitution, enshrined the system of slavery into the fabric of the national document with the Three-fifths Compromise. That catastrophic human rights

failure is not recognized in the transition from the Articles of Confederation which did not mention slavery. The language to justify the continuation of institutional slavery ignored the moral and ethical violations of sanctioning enslavement for profit. In June 2011, there was a question that attempted to explain the memorialization of slavery in the Constitution, “Which statement most accurately explains why the institution of slavery was continued under the original Constitution of the United States? [choice 4] Southern states would not agree to a constitution that banned slavery” (NYSED, 2022). A question I asked is, which people from Southern states? Surely the thousands of enslaved people in Southern states would support a ban and opt for freedom. However, the assumption in this response is that *Southern states* in their totality were actually the planting class, excluding the thousands of enslaved Black people, Indigenous People, and landless Whites living in the South at the time of the Constitution’s creation. The geographic term *Southern states* subsumes whole categories of people and only represents the point of view of people who profited from that oppressed labor.

In one single question, #4 from June 2017, some conditions enslaved people endured were acknowledged. The question featured an outline with four phrases:

- A. Brought to colonies against their will
- B. Endured brutal condition
- C. Provided labor for a successful agricultural economy
- D. Resisted attempts to eliminate their culture” (NYSED, 2022).

The correct response to the question about the “best title” for such an outline was “[choice 2] Enslaved Africans in the South” (NYSED, 2022). Other incorrect choices were “[1] Chinese immigrants on the west coast, [4] Mexican farmers in the southwest” (NYSED, 2022). I noted that phrase C in the outline connected enslaved labor with economic success, and a question to

ask is, a successful agricultural economy for whom? This is another objective phrase that covertly exonerated the system of slavery because it brought financial gain to the planting class.

Question #3 in January 2007 asked “Which document included John Locke’s idea that people have the right to overthrow an oppressive government? [choice 3] Declaration of Independence” (NYSED, 2022). I asked, which people? Enslaved Africans did not have this right; therefore, they were excluded from the term *people* in this question.

To reiterate the findings from Chapter 4, questions focused on early democratic foundations utilized the language *people* to explain rights granted in documents, like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Groups such as enslaved people Africans, Indigenous People, landless people, non-Congregation members, and women, were excluded from the democratic foundations. At the time, these rights were intended for a specific group of people in North America, but in failing to qualify the term people, in failing to identify who the exclusive groups were that enjoyed such rights, the exam continued the generic terminology used in the 1700s to conceal oppression and continued to dehumanize these excluded groups into the 21st century.

Campaign Finance

As described in Chapter 4, the *Citizens United versus Federal Election Committee* (2010) decision, which changed the rules of campaign finance in the United States and empowered the ultra-rich, was completely absent from all exams after 2010. This exclusion illustrates a failure to confront historical developments that limit democracy. To make connections between previously disassociated topics, per Villaverde et al.’s (2006) framework to investigate history, the following two questions suggested approval of the wealth gap that perpetuates funding of campaign costs by the few. Two multiple-choice questions that appeared in the 2005 and 2017

exams signaled the acceptance of and support for the wealth gap in the United States, which allows for excessive campaign financing by individuals. Question #19 in June 2005 cited Andrew Carnegie’s funding for libraries and educational institutions through his sharing of wealth. Question #45 in June 2017 read, “Andrew Carnegie’s financial support for public libraries and Bill Gates’ funding of medical care in Africa best illustrate [choice 4] a commitment to using personal wealth to help others” (NYSED, 2022).

These multiple-choice questions communicated an approval of massive wealth (so much so that an individual can finance medical care on another continent), whilst ignoring the impacts a growing wealth gap has on institutions that form the bedrock of the United States, like free and fair elections.

Female Oppressions

Fifteen questions, or roughly 68% of all questions concerning gendered political issues, emphasized suffrage, while zero mentioned coverture. This focus contributed to a patriotic narrative that emphasized both the White experience and corrective action. This pattern also ignored the degradation and diminution for all women that resulted from disenfranchisement and other forms of oppression, like coverture. The restrictions and compounded effect of subjugation existed for hundreds of years prior to and continuing after the passage of the 19th amendment. These historical developments were entirely absent from the exam questions.

Coverture laws treated married women as legally void in a country that values the rights of citizenship as the highest level of legal protection. Primary source documents on coverture from the 19th and early 20th centuries reveal that reports on the dismantling of coverture are often the key sources of information about coverture itself. Some of the coverture laws were traditions carried over from Europe, and so the laws reversing these practices are the official record of the

policy. For example, Breckinridge (1929) wrote about a variety of laws dismantling pieces of coverture; women had previously been unable to make a legal will but were granted that right in Connecticut in 1809 and Illinois in 1829. Kansas granted women the right to manage her own children in 1859 and New York granted women the right to own her personal earnings in 1860.

The experiences of women in the survey U.S. history course are limited, despite a plethora of primary sources and research articles demonstrating diverse female experiences in political and economic spheres. The survey curriculum purports to foster student analysis of primary sources, particularly since the demand for more culturally relevant education in American classrooms entered the pedagogical conversation (Ladson-Billings, 1994). However, the continued absence of any documents or historical developments referencing coverture (Schmidt, 2012; Trecker, 1971) is not due to any lack of information or documentation. There exists an abundance of primary sources from historical data bases with both rich and accessible language for students to analyze coverture laws from a female perspective. For example, Anne Brown (ca. 1880s) conveyed the injustice of coverture and patriarchy by stating, “men have been taught that they are absolute monarchs in this country (even in a republican country)” (para. 1). This one sentence provides a clear opportunity for students to read a primary source written by a woman and to analyze her message, which compares patriarchy with absolutism. As a history teacher, I could imagine the rich conversation that single sentence would generate in a classroom discussion! And yet these conversations are not occurring because Brown’s (ca. 1880s) words and all primary source documents related to coverture were omitted from the collection of questions and written primary texts on the U.S. History Regents exam.

Plantations

As described in Chapter 4, the evaluation of multiple-choice questions centering on geography and slavery revealed that the phrasing of questions, along with the exclusion of enslavement, obscured responsibility for a system that severely violated human rights in exchange for the economic gains of the British descended colonial planter class.

Only two of the eight multiple-choice questions that focused on geography and plantations connected the system of slavery to the plantation economy, and both did so in a way that justified enslavement on plantations. Question #1 from August 2006 pictured a map of the 13 colonies with shading to indicate “Slaves as a proportion of total population” (NYSED, 2022). The question stated, “A conclusion supported by the information on the map is that slavery in the American colonies was [choice 2] concentrated in areas suitable for large plantations” (NYSED, 2022). The use of the adjective *suitable* suggested a positive and almost natural relationship between slavery and plantations, hiding oppression through, as Dozono (2022) wrote, a passive voice.

The second question from January 2002 stated, “Before the Civil War, slavery expanded in the South rather than in the North because [choice 4] geographic conditions in the South encouraged the development of large plantations” (NYSED, 2022). The Southern planting class oppressed and enslaved Black Americans to build wealth and power, yet this question pre-interpreted meaning for students by connecting slave ownership to geographic conditions (with the positive verb *encouraged*) rather than to human agency. This is an example of canonization, a form of problematic recontextualization from Dickens (2021).

The Emphasis on Geography

In addition to connecting plantation economies exclusively to climate, the exam also used cardinal direction to subsume diversity. In June 2001, #14 asked “Southern states attempted to limit the impact of constitutional amendments passed during the Reconstruction Era by (1) passing Jim Crow law” (NYSED, 2022). The term *Southern states*, conveys a singular lens, when in actuality these states in the South were comprised of millions of Black Americans that suffered under Jim Crow laws. The suggestion is that the folks favoring Jim Crow, the elected legislators, were, in totality, the *Southern states*. By failing to qualify who specifically favored Jim Crow laws in Southern states, and instead using a cardinal direction to define an entire area of diverse people, the exam was covertly generating one lens and erasing groups of people from the historical record.

The Great Plains and the Louisiana Purchase

As noted in Chapter 4, multiple-choice questions around the Louisiana Purchase excluded Indigenous People entirely. This is problematic because it perpetuates—even into the 21st century—the same exclusionary beliefs Jefferson held when he purchased this land from France “without consulting any affected Indigenous nations” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 95), which included many tribes who lived and thrived on that same land such as “Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Pawnee, Osage, and Comanche” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 95).

The Regents multiple-choice questions from 2001-2020 were presented to students in the same lens the Jefferson administration approached the political deal in 1803, with the exclusion of Indigenous People and no regard for their natural rights to the land. The questions erased Indigenous People from that historical development and absolved the United States government from the decisions and consequences initiated by and resulting from the Louisiana Purchase.

Indigenous People

For Indigenous People, the exams never connected the forces of white supremacy as a motivating principle for the violence perpetuated against them throughout the centuries. Indigenous People were nearly 100% absent from any questions with 21st century historical developments. This signals to New York students that Indigenous People either disappeared or were *successfully assimilated*, failing to acknowledge the struggles, the triumphs, the sovereignty, and the powers of these communities in modern North America. There was only one question in 2,850 that acknowledged Indigenous People's existence in the 21st century. In that question, #46 from August 2010, the exam paid homage to the federal government for creating a memorial along the "Trail of Tears" (NYSED, 2022), thus highlighting and celebrating corrective action from the federal government whilst still failing to include modern Indigenous experiences.

Immigration and Nativist Language

To grasp the shift in immigration at the turn of the 20th century, it is important to reiterate context from the time period and understand the changing demographics. Two authors summarized this seismic change. Okrent (2019) cited that "In 1882 fewer than 15% of European immigrants came from the regions east of Germany and south of present-day Austria. Then everything changed" (p. 46). And Zinn (1999) clarified their relationship to Northern Europeans, "In the 1880s and 1890s, immigrants were pouring in from Europe at a faster rate than before. Now there were not so many Irish and German immigrants as Italian, Russians Jews, Greeks-people from Southern and Eastern Europe, even more alien to native-born Anglo-Saxons than the earlier newcomers" (p. 265).

The Quota Acts of the 1920s were intentionally crafted to limit the immigration of non-Northern and Western Europeans. Yet this motivation is obscured or omitted in many of the questions, simply referring to limits on immigration in general.

The pie charts in questions #16 and #17 from August 2017 depicted racial immigration in 1860-1900 and then in 1900-1920. The correct response to “What was one result of the changes in immigration patterns shown in the charts?” was “[choice 1] restrictive immigration laws were passed” (NYSED, 2022). Villaverde et al.’s (2006) framework investigated history with questions. Therefore, I asked, restricting laws against which groups? The information is omitted, and the white supremacist motive of the laws was obscured.

Furthermore, the racial underpinnings of the Chinese Exclusion Act, based on hate, fear, and racial prejudice were omitted. Of the five questions including the Chinese Exclusion Act, two focused on the impact of the law, which was to limit immigration, and the other two focused their responses on causes, being nativism in general. By failing to clearly connect nativism to white supremacy, the exam obscured racial intentions and the power of the racial class system in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Furthermore, the Chinese Exclusion Act was predated by Asian hate laws, such as the one in California that made it illegal “for a Chinese person to testify in court against a white” (Okrent 2019, p. 44).

Yet in crafting questions about the Chinese American relations a decade later, the Open Door policy multiple-choice questions emphasized the economic intentions of the United States government and excluded the imperial intentions of Open Door, which was for the U.S. to have equal access with other countries in “exploiting China” (Zinn, 1999, p. 408). For example, question #24 in January 2007 read, “A primary reason for the establishment of the Open Door Policy (1899) was to [choice 1] protect United States trade in the Far East” (NYSED, 2022). The

verb *protect* clearly denoted positive intentions in a more complicated and exploitive situation. The one primary source in all 57 exams on this issue was in #21 from June 2016. It is from Secretary of State John Hay emphasizing the benevolent side of Open Door, to preserve “peace to China” (NYSED, 2022), again focusing on a single lens (Dickens, 2021) by portraying the United States as entirely motivated by humanitarian interests.

The United States in the Western Hemisphere

As stated in Chapter 4, Monroe Doctrine questions centered around the United States preventing European intervention and colonization, but as Zinn (1999) pointed out, the goal of the doctrine was not just to keep Europeans out of Latin American but to clarify that Central and South America were in the United States’ “sphere of influence” (p. 297). Mayer (2017) reported that the Monroe Doctrine was “meant to conceal the face of northern domination” (p. 77) and that Simon Bolivar believed it a doctrine to justify trespassing. These intentions were not conveyed in any exam questions.

The United States’ intervention in Latin America predicated on the rights established in the Monroe Doctrine were revealed in maps only and not in any other written documents. Three questions from June 2007, June 2008, and January 2012 featured half page maps of the Western Hemisphere marking places and dates with United States imperial actions, marked as “interventions.” No other details were included. There was no specific mention of the United States support of the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, nor other details such as the U.S. “marines in Buenos Aires... [or] naval forces in Montevideo” (Zinn, 1999, p. 298). There were no written questions on the United States involvement in any Latin American elections or coup d’états, including the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile, the Iran-Contra affair, or the Sheridan Circle Bombings, which resulted in the deaths of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt

on U.S. soil. There were four multiple-choice questions centered on the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and the exam deployed neutral language like *intervening*. Number 20 in June 2013 read, “The Roosevelt Corollary (1904) to the Monroe Doctrine proclaimed the right of the United States to [choice 1] intervene in the internal affairs of Latin American nations” (NYSED, 2022). In this question the noun *right* is used to justify United States claims to an entire continent.

The Mexican American War of 1846 was presented as a natural evolution of the United States’ political boundaries. There were no questions that represented the impact on the lives of the people who lived in these spaces, their absence from all questions suggested the erasure of their existence and the land only seemed to exist to service the United States government. The lens of the exam perpetuated the same views from the 19th century war campaign. Schoultz (1998) wrote that people of diverse political affiliations agreed in 1846, “whatever the outcome of the war might be, the land to be taken from Mexico should be as devoid of Mexicans as possible” (p. 33). The military offensive nature of the war was also obscured. Schoultz (1998) documented, the United States instigated military violence when “President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to occupy contested territory” (p. 28), thus initiating the two-year long war of conquest.

The three multiple-choice questions with Western Hemisphere maps used language such as, “The main purpose of the map is to illustrate the [choice 2] development of United States imperialism” from June 2007, “United States military was used to protect American interests” in January 2012, and “United States intervention in the Caribbean Area” as a title for the map from June 2008 (NYSED, 2022). Generalizations about protecting interests of the United States

excluded resulting violence of U.S. conquests in Latin America, and fostered a single lens for students (Dickens, 2021).

Cartoons and U.S. Imperialism

The featured cartoons related to United States, Latin America, and imperialism generally strayed from the patriotic, master narrative that was woven throughout other questions. The cartoons featured anti-democratic messages, such as the cartoon of Teddy Roosevelt throwing dirt on Bogotá. Another example was a cartoon from August 2005 depicting an anthropomorphic elephant that supported trade with China while simultaneously rejecting trade with Cuba. Another cartoon in January 2005 featured an overweight Uncle Sam growing dangerously large from imperial conquests.

The inclusion of these cartoons demonstrates two competing conclusions. The exam was willing to acknowledge imperialism as hypocritical to the theoretical underpinnings of the United States. Yet the chosen medium for this acknowledgement was exclusively through cartoons, and this connects to the preferential treatment written works have received in Western academia. The preponderance and importance of evidence derived from formal written works is noted by Dickens (2021) and Villaverde et al. (2006). By confronting the anti-democratic actions of imperialism in cartoon format only and excluding any written documents, for example a protest speech from an anti-imperial American, or a letter or diary entry from a victim of U.S. imperialism, these issues were presented from limited perspectives. The exam partially acknowledged oppression with visuals while still upholding the positive, patriotic narrative.

The Practices of Redlining and the Interstate Highway Act

Redlining and the Interstate Highway Act illustrated federal practices that perpetuated systemic racial segregation. Redlining is absent on the exam and each question featuring the

Interstate Highway Act celebrated the legislation as an achievement for suburban growth, the discriminatory motives and impact were hidden.

Interning of Japanese Americans during and after World War II

Regarding the questions around internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the later 1940s, the multiple-choice questions demonstrated a pattern that focus on a single lens, government justification for the Executive Order and the *Korematsu v. United States* (1944) decision. There is no lens for the lived experiences of the tens of thousands of American citizens forced to relinquish everything and move into these camps. This historical development was exceptionized in the framing of questions surrounding the Executive Order 9066 to the Supreme Court Case *Korematsu v. United States* (1944). There were zero questions that centered on material or emotional losses, whether that be quantitative losses, such as businesses and homes or qualitative losses, such as photos, team memberships, and friends. In one exam, question #29 in June 2005, the question asked, “Which wartime policy toward Japanese Americans was upheld by the Supreme Court in its 1944 ruling in *Korematsu v. United States*?” and the correct response was “[choice 4] confinement in internment camps” (NYSED, 2022). I labeled confinement with an *N* from my concept coding, meaning that the noun *confinement* obscured the confiscation of their entire lives. These people were more than confined, they lost homes, businesses, possessions, licenses, dignity, gardens, and so much more. *Confinement* is a narrow and misleading noun centered in the correct response for this multiple-choice question.

Even within the two questions that acknowledged wrongdoing by the United States government against Japanese Americans, the patriotic narrative was still upheld in January 2017. Question #31 asked, “During World War II, the federal government was accused of violating constitutional rights by,” and the correct response was “[choice 3] relocating Japanese

Americans to internment camps” (NYSED, 2022). The selection of the verb *accused* infused an unresolved position into the situation. However, President Ford officially apologized via Proclamation 4417 in 1976 and President Bush issued restitution payments to descendants, which was an official acknowledgment of the violation. The question could have read “During World War II, the federal government violated constitutional rights by...” However, by inserting the verb *accused*, the question diminished the reality of the situation, which was the undeniable violation of rights for tens of thousands of American citizens.

Excluded Content

The excluded content discussed in Chapter 4 is a mere sampling of hidden historical developments in this survey U.S. history exam, and I discovered the vast impacts of these developments through independent research outside of the standard curriculum. I recognize the delimitation of this small group in my study and I will disclose here the selection process behind these groups. First, the excluded topics of LGBTQ+ people’s experiences, redlining, and coverture are a few developments reflecting wider systemic oppressions that occurred for decades or centuries against groups of individuals. These were not single events but rather patterns of behavior that call for serious examination of the power structures and advantages that resulted from oppressive dynamics. Redlining was, for example, “Fundamentally and intentionally discriminatory in nature, government redlining *was* private redlining and vice versa” (LaDale & Michney, 2021, p. 44). These systemic practices that intended to maintain power and wealth in certain groups while suppressing other groups are extremely important because they contextualize other civil rights victories frequently highlighted from the 20th century, such as President Eisenhower supporting the Little Rock 9, the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, or the 19th Amendment. Progress and regression are intricately and

complexly intertwined in U.S. history and the absence of these excluded topics denies students access to that complexity, prevents them from wrestling with parallel chronological developments, and limits them from seeing the durability of oppressive systems and connections between past and present. It also signals the marginalization of their existence and perpetuates the illusion of American meritocracy standing on a system of unfettered equity. Second, the excluded Supreme Court cases dismantled systems designed to bolster democratic practices. *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee* (2010) were landmark decisions with short- and long-term consequences influencing election campaigns and voting procedures in the United States. Anderson (2018) reported on the immediate impacts of the *Shelby County* (2013) decision, “Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia all passed a series of voter suppression laws” (p. 217) with thirteen more states restricting access before the 2014 midterm elections. The exclusion of these landmark Supreme Court cases signaled a commitment to focus students’ attention on expansion of democracy and away from regression, especially when the regressive actions are the most recent trends. Third, the firebombing of Japan during World War II, a widespread attack on 67 cities, was a significant component of the war in Asia. The admission of Robert McNamara referenced in Chapter 2 is the United States would have been convicted of war crimes because of the firebombing if they had they lost World War II (Morris, 2003). This erasure signifies a commitment to a history that bolsters the master narrative at the expense of excluding a key wartime decision which left hundreds of thousands of people dead. This deletion matters because it is an omission that serves to bolster a narrative of American exceptionalism, specifically during international conflict. Fourth, the exclusion of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire is negligent because this major labor rights tragedy killed 146 people in New York City and

resulted in significant labor protections across New York State. The deaths were nearly all poor Jewish and Italian immigrant women, and I suppose one can only speculate the reason it was rejected from the collection of tested topics.

As a history teacher I often remind my students that the United States is a country where information is free, where you can research historical events from the comfort of your computer or phone. This is different from a country where students (or adults) may be blocked from researching controversial events on the internet. However, United States educators committed to culturally responsive education must set a higher standard beyond the mere access and availability of diverse resources for a few reasons. One is, with the widespread use of the internet, students can access these hidden developments more easily than ever before. A student can type *redlining* or *coverture* into a research engine and multiple articles or videos will instantly pop up for their viewing. They are no longer concealed on dusty shelves of library books; their disclosure is more and more inevitable, and their absence from a survey history course could serve to delegitimize a curriculum that excludes them. Another reason to center excluded developments and intentionally promote a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives is because students deserve that complexity in a democratic education. The simple *availability* of marginalized content is not enough and does not set the United States as far apart from the systems that censor content inside of more restrictive governments as we may believe. As Anzaldúa (2010) wrote “Ignorance splits people, creates prejudice. A misinformed people are a subjugated people” (p. 108). The excluded developments themselves are othered when they are not standard benchmarks in the curriculum, as compared to the Louisiana Purchase or 19th Amendment, which are always included as pinnacles of the United States’ past. In their introduction on the excluded content in the U.S. history labor narrative, Cole et al. (2011) wrote

“Imagine opening a high school U.S. history textbook and finding no mention of- or at most a passing sentence about- Valley Forge, the Missouri Compromise, or the League of Nations” (p. 4). The inclusion of traditionally excluded content in a survey course guarantees students the right to grapple with conflicting interests that are paralleled with the evolution of the United States’ democratic experiment. It also normalizes the study of actions that were not traditionally included as content pillars. A culturally responsive curriculum is a democratic curriculum because to challenge, to confront, to engage, to inquire, and to evolve are the tenets of a democratic society. These curriculum practices can also help reposition how we conceptualize patriotism. Rather than blind obedience to a master narrative generated from limited developments and limited perspectives, patriotism can be the product of an inclusive, inquiry-based, investigative approach to our national history.

Summary

Documents Over Experiences

A central conclusion of this research is the importance of discerning between the writing in founding documents like the Preamble of the Constitution and *the specific groups those words were intended for* at the time. The default interpretation on the U.S. History Regents exam has been to defer to the objectivity of the documents, thus obscuring the conditions at the time and erasing experiences of excluded groups, an example of knowledge made static from Dickens (2021). This distinction is relevant because terms in the Preamble such as *We the people* appear objective and wholistic, when at the time that assumption was untrue.

The exam relied on messages from formal, written documents over the human experiences of marginalized groups when testing students on developments in the 18th century. Ultimately in looking at questions like #5 in June 2010, which cited the Preamble of the

Constitution and asked, “In this passage, the authors are stating that [choice 3] sovereignty belongs to the people of the nation” (NYSESED, 2022), or #10 in January 2012, “What is a principle of government that is stated in the Preamble to the United State Constitution? [choice 2] the power of government comes from the people” (NYSESED, 2022), I am compelled to ask questions about an objectively presented history (Villaverde et al., 2000).

Which people did sovereignty belong to in 1789? What the authors of this document wrote and what they executed were two different realities. Which people gave power to the government in 1789? Many groups, Black Americans, Indigenous People, and women were excluded. Question #3 from June 2013 asked, “Which two key principles of government are included in the Declaration of Independence?” [choice 4] consent of the governed and natural rights” (NYSESED, 2022). I asked, natural rights and consent were guaranteed to whom?

Future research might consider how the interpretation of primary sources for history students seeks to preserve the master narrative, as well as the curation of sources. By excluding documents that have been produced by oppressed groups, such as Douglas’ (1852) “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” or primary source documents from women combatting coverture, standardized exams tether themselves to the master narrative.

Progressive Narrative

A progress narrative was recognized in central historical developments such as racial justice and election integrity. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) was absent from all exams. In January 2016 #43 stated, “A major impact of the 24th amendment banning poll taxes and of the 1965 Voting Rights Act was the [choice 4] elimination of discriminatory voting practices against African Americans” (NYSESED, 2022). In August 2016, question #15 included a section of the Voting Rights Act and asked, “The specific goal stated in

this section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was to [choice 4] remove barriers to voting based on racial backgrounds” (NYSESED, 2022).

When the above exams were being written, the Voting Rights Act was in the process of being dismantled and yet that development is absent from the question. Instead, the original law was quoted and celebrated as an achievement. This evidence demonstrates a commitment to a progressive narrative because of selectively included content that substantiates progress and excluded content that threatens the impression of progress. This is an example from Dickens (2021) knowledge made static as problematic recontextualization. Another question attempted to capture the totality of the Black American experience with the following, “Which sequence shows the correct order of events related to the history of African Americans in the United States? [choice 2] Emancipation Proclamation – Radical Reconstruction – Great Migration- Brown v. Board of Education decision” (NYSESED, 2022). This question, #49 from August 2007, emphasized progress and correction, and excluded critical federal developments in the period that fostered discrimination, such as *Plessy versus Ferguson* (1896). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision did more than separate under false premises of equality, it constitutionally approved racial inferiority into the federal schema of post-Civil War America.

Number 42 in June 2016 showed three parts of an outline with *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States* (1964), Voting Rights of 1965, Fair Housing Act of 1968, and asked students to choose the correct title, “Civil Rights Movement Achieves Victories” (NYSESED, 2022). The Fair Housing Act attempted to right the wrong of redlining. In this part of the same exam the corrective action by the federal government was acknowledged, but the original discriminatory act itself, redlining from the 1930s, was excluded from all exams, thus perpetuating a progress narrative by including corrective legal action while excluding the very practice that correction

sought to address. Similarly noted in Chapter 4's findings, the corrective action of farm worker movements was celebrated, as was the public for supporting this corrective action. However, the real oppressions and experiences from migrant farmer exploitation were not central in any of the questions.

The commitment to an always progressing narrative in the permutation of content on the exam is important because it suggests to students that U.S. history moves along a positive and mostly linear, predictable path, where oppressive intentions are not as threatening now as they were in the past and corrective action is inevitable.

A democratic experiment is always a work in progress, there are struggles and triumphs, in the past, in the present, and waiting in the future. But if the struggles are ignored or glossed over and exceptionized, the exam positions the United States as extraordinary, especially in comparison to other countries where modern struggles might be more readily examined and connected to more distant histories. It creates a one-dimensional understanding of an intricate nation-state that constantly wrestles with both progression and regression. This failure to provide students with complex historical developments might prevent them from processing real threats to their democracy when they do occur, because there is not a schema for their place in the U.S. historical lineage, and because the very admission of their existence could feel treasonous to acknowledge.

Perspective Deficit

A perspective deficit was found in a variety of topics across the 57 exams. In evaluating the questions centered on the growing boundaries of the United States, the experiences of Indigenous People losing their land as the United States "purchases, acquires, or negotiates" territory, were silent in the phrasing of the questions. In the historical developments occurring

after 1941, the perspectives of interned Americans on their forced removal, loss of land, property, professional businesses, and more, did not exist in any questions. The hypocrisy of enslaving humans in tandem with the development of an iconic democratic government in the 18th century was minorly acknowledged as a result of geographic differences. The perspectives of many people excluded from the democratic systems—nonwhites, women, Indigenous People, landless people prior to the 1820s—were erased when the exam perpetuated generic terms that concealed oppression.

The Philippine-American War was also absent from the exam except for its single appearance in the bullets of an August 2019 imperialism question. “The United States fights an insurrection in the Philippine Islands” as an example of the “Rise of American Imperialism” was featured in question #19 (NYSED, 2022). The verb *rise* suggested a natural evolution in U.S. dominance. The phrase *fighting an insurrection* was acutely misleading; the “insurrection” was caused by the refusal of the United States to accept Philippine independence after the defeat of the Spanish. At the time Emilio Aguinaldo, leader of the Philippines independence movement, was troubled after President McKinley declined to remove American troops. The Filipino people had drafted a constitution and issued a currency in preparation for state building, fully expecting their independence (Immerwahr, 2019). The United States was not fighting an insurrection, they were conquering a nation and colonizing people more than halfway around the world after they had assured them independence.

This deficit in perspectives is culturally destructive because participants in the education process, including students and teachers, do not know what they do not know, and the exam is presented as an objective assessment of important history in North America, free from perspective. Yet the very absence of these voices forgives a government that committed violence

against certain groups. It absolves the people that benefitted from and perpetuated that violence. The exam from 2001-2020 upheld a whitewashed master narrative. This creates a difficult situation for teachers hoping to engage in genuine multi-cultural lesson planning. It can also be disorienting for students from marginalized groups who are, in ways, being forced to assimilate to the master narrative by preparing for this exam. As stated in Chapter 2, this assessment is crucial in the rating of teachers, schools, and is a requirement for high school graduation for New York State public school students; as a result, it drives a significant amount of the instructional choices in the survey of United States history course.

Implications and Recommendations

In identifying these trends, teachers and curriculum writers might better be able to identify and understand the sclerotic master narrative as it existed in prior curricula. The schematic narrative template of the United States elevates the words in founding documents over the experiences of founding people. In deconstructing the fabric of the master narrative, educators can meaningfully commit to challenging assumptions with the infusion of diverse resources.

The literature review in Chapter 2 disclosed that early founding ideals “remain an important part of the U.S. culture and are still used by marginalized groups to justify their struggles for human rights and equality” (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 9). While this is true in certain instances, it is an optimistic conclusion that ignores another reality. In this effort to reconcile the inconsistencies of rhetoric versus action in the early days of the nation-state, and to highlight and glorify the former, the curriculum must also recognize the reverse. The values of the master narrative (e.g., democracy, egalitarianism, equal opportunity) are not only tools for the oppressed but are also weapons of the oppressor. Marginalized voices asking for recognition

and equity are sometimes painted as acrimonious, unpatriotic outsiders for simply challenging the image and history of an exceptional nation-state. Sometimes the oppressors and traditional beneficiaries of the master narrative seek to delegitimize the very values that the oppressed are using to be heard, and this research recognizes the power of standardized exams in fostering and cultivating that master narrative.

To legitimize a culturally responsive curriculum, as New York State mandates in their CRSE (2019) framework, the master narrative must be confronted, and the first step towards confrontation is an unmasking of subjectivity through identifications in seemingly objective spaces, such as standardized exams. To foster historical thinking skills in our students, we must as a discipline of history educators evaluate the ways that survey United States history courses have, as Freire (1993) would say, banked a narrative about who we are as a nation to students, rather than creating space for multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations. In his book on sundown towns, Loewen (2005) described the criticality of learning about one lost topic, but I think his logic can apply to a variety of hidden historical developments.

The truth about sundown towns implicates the powers that be. From the towns that passed sundown ordinances, to the county sheriffs who escorted black would-be residents back across the county lines... to the federal government- whose lending and insurance policies from the 1930s to the 1960s required sundown neighborhoods and suburbs- our governments openly favored white supremacy and helped to create and maintain all-white communities... If public relations offices, Chambers of Commerce, and local historical societies don't want us to know something, perhaps that something is worth learning. After all, how can we deal with something if we cannot even face it? (Loewen, 2005, p. 16).

Turning towards hidden historical developments can be a first step in this process as well as an opportunity. Understanding why they have been hidden can create rich opportunities for critical student analysis and student historiography. Survey U.S. history courses are the primary avenue for students to face diverse and difficult histories. Therefore we must collaborate to research and infuse hidden histories into our curriculum, not as appendages but as central discussion topics because the perception of an inevitable and exceptional nation-state as taught through high school survey U.S. history courses might, among other things, breed complacency. Marshall and Gram (2022) encouraged a curriculum with diverse resources to “help students see through the disingenuous attempts to whitewash history, because they come to understand how the production of history works” (p. 790). As noted from Zimmerman (2004) in Chapter 1, diverse histories are important for all groups—not just those that have been traditionally marginalized—because democracies rely on a dynamically educated citizen body. All students benefit from a diversity of perspectives and freedom to interpret evidence, predict outcomes, and see their nation as one that strives for democracy and requires critical thinking.

In short, we must free the curriculum from forced interpretations of evidence that inevitably influence the type of content and array of perspectives that are selected for inclusion and exclusion. For example, students should be as familiar with the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre as they are with the formation of the United Nations. *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) should not be taught in isolation from the horrific death of Emmett Till that occurred the very next year. The 1887 Dawes Severalty Act should never be taught as merely a superficial assimilationist project, students should grapple with the federal government’s methods to annihilate entire Indigenous groups and force them into cultural genocide. Multiple voices from these experiences must be included and students should be

permitted to derive their own conclusions about the intentions and inevitable *or avoidable* paths that followed. I chose to review the survey U.S. history exam because the survey U.S. course is responsible for teaching the story of the United States, and that story builds a schematic narrative template for young people of the United States in their modern world. It is crucial for our children to reject blind American exceptionalism because that schema will inherently delegitimize voices that question a coherently progressive narrative.

There is a historical adage that says hindsight is 20/20, suggesting that when the historical dust has settled multiple paths become clear to evaluators in the present. This phrase means that students too can see alternate conclusions when examining historical developments and wrestle with regressions in democracy, and, ipso facto, should be permitted to critically evaluate causes and effects. Educators do not always have to frame the sequence of historical developments as inevitably glorious and justified while placing them onto a pedestal of exceptionalism. Schools revolve around consensus (Apple, 2019), but we can challenge that tradition by creating the space to imagine other possibilities for our students.

As history educators we also need to carefully examine the language and vocabulary of included content for violent insinuations. Language shapes power dynamics and this research discovered oppressions were embedded across a wide array of topics and terminology on the U.S. History Regents exam. Moving forward, if a standardized exam is going to specifically label imprisoned, innocent American citizens during World War II as *Japanese Americans*, then it should also, for example, avoid all-consuming cardinal direction terms like *the South* when crafting questions about a very specific group of individuals. According to Fairclough (2003), communities that comprise general pronouns such as *we* or the plural *you* are often “elusive, shifting, and vague” (p.150). Educators and test writers can meaningfully confront that

ambiguity with equitable clarifications for all groups. They can also address the general lack of transparency in test creation. There are no specific authors of the Regents exam and so accountability for question framing and excluded content is difficult to determine.

New York State teachers, anecdotally speaking, are aware of the constraints of this exam to a certain extent. As a teacher of this survey U.S. history course, I notice educators in the field are more aware of the flagrant exclusions of historical developments and possibly less aware of the violent insinuations crafted within the language of the exam and the hidden perspectives attached to popular developments, such as the Louisiana Purchase. I was distressed at my own shock from the included content findings, particularly the coding of white supremacy as a *value*, the perpetuation of oppressive perspectives from centuries ago, and the use of cardinal directions to conceal oppression and subsume groups of exploited people. I found the framing of oppression to be distressing. The way exploitation was exceptionized or justified for the gains of small groups of people, which were then connected to the gains of the nation-state, served to solidify the legitimacy of these claims, which were banked (Freire, 1993) to students and concealed as objective facts.

Moving forward, I aspire for these research conclusions to resist the challenges of this exam's nature, which include oppressions that are, to quote Trecker (1971) from Chapter 2, "smooth, seamless, and pervasive" (p. 138). We can start with conversations about the limitations of the exam and its intersection with the culturally responsive expectations of New York State. The epistemological assumptions baked into the exam are contradictory to the foundations of culturally responsive education practices, which rest on diversity of process and diversity of interpretation. Within the boundaries of the classroom, New York teachers, administrators, and students are still tethered to this exam in real time. One suggestion is to

leverage a discourse analysis method to reject a positivist approach and infuse culturally responsive practices into lesson planning and test preparation. Doing so will activate students' agency and democratize their study of history. Teachers can employ a historiographic approach and present the Regents questions and responses as culturally significant artifacts for students to decode. In the language of Fairclough (2003) students can analyze which groups are continually "activated...the one who makes things happens" (p. 145) and compare their findings to groups that are continually "passivated... the ones affected by process" (p. 145).

Finally, as educators we need to confront comprehensive questions that scholars like Wertsch (2008) posed, such as, to what extent does the discipline of history teach historical thinking skills and to what extent does the survey United States history course orient its mission around nation-building and a perpetuation of the established hierarchy? Although these questions are complex and layered in multiple perspectives and centuries of experiences, we as educators are obliged to confront both the traditional pillars and *traditional intentions* of this course. Returning to the theory of critical inquiry, which "keeps the spotlight on power relationships within society so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157), the nature of this research is to continue searching and continue questioning. The new format of the United States History and Government Regents Exam debuted in June 2023. It still includes multiple choice questions with four choice response options. It still is a standardized high stakes exam and a requirement for high school graduation in New York. It still is a central instructional focus for the survey U.S. history course offered in junior year of high school. Therefore, future research interests lie in the extent to which the new configuration of the exam perpetuates or disrupts the oppressions and obscurations from the previous version, active from 2001-2020 and examined in this dissertation. Ultimately, if history educators aspire to be more inclusive and

avoid superficially rebranding the course as culturally responsive while still fostering narrow perspectives, then I hope this research will merely be the start of a deep reflection into survey United States history exams and courses, even beyond the Regents exam and beyond the state of New York.

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Appendix A - Table of Acquired Paper Copies of the New York State United States History and Government Regents Exam

Appendix A Table A.1

Key:

X = paper exam acquired for this study

NA = not applicable for this study, a different version that falls outside the research parameters

C = no exam administered due to the COVID-19 pandemic

B = exam cancelled due to the 2022 Buffalo, NY mass shooting

| YEARS | January | June | August |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| 2001 | NA | X | X |
| 2002 | X | X | X |
| 2003 | X | X | X |
| 2004 | X | X | X |
| 2005 | X | X | X |
| 2006 | X | X | X |
| 2007 | X | X | X |
| 2008 | X | X | X |
| 2009 | X | X | X |
| 2010 | X | X | X |
| 2011 | X | X | X |
| 2012 | X | X | X |
| 2013 | X | X | X |
| 2014 | X | X | X |
| 2015 | X | X | X |
| 2016 | X | X | X |
| 2017 | X | X | X |
| 2018 | X | X | X |
| 2019 | X | X | X |
| 2020 | X | C | C |
| 2021 | C | C | C |
| 2022 | C | B | B |
| 2023 | B | NA | NA |

Appendix B - Concept Codes for Exam Analysis

- Geo = geography trumps social actors
- S = the system of slavery is obscured
- +F = the federal government is portrayed positively, usually by fixing or correcting a past problem
- -F = the federal government is portrayed negatively, by mishandling a problem, fostering corruption or discrimination
- +C = denotes a correction of a past wrongdoing
- GE = a gross exclusion of facts that misrepresent the development
- IPM = Indigenous People Missing
- Aud = interrogates the intended audience of the question
- CC = for cartoon critique and indicates any visual (cartoon, photograph) that acknowledges oppression
- SR = recognizes Southern racism, in states formerly a part of the Confederate States of America
- L = language or terminology obscures undemocratic actions (such as “Manifest Destiny”)
- V = verb choice obscures oppression,
- N = noun choice obscures oppression
- O = acknowledges obstacles to democracy
- WS = white supremacy alluded to but obscured in some way
- WSA = white supremacy clearly acknowledged