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In 2020, as the nation experienced a racial reckoning, the North Carolina State Board of Education was in the process of adopting new social studies standards. The racial reckoning constituted a policy window to advocate for standards that better included marginalized experiences. In response, conservative lawmakers engaged in a political spectacle that advocated to remove language such as "systemic racism" from the standards and mirrored language from President Trump's 1776 Commission. The back-and-forth process of the standards adoption resulted in a more inclusive final version of the standards than the earliest draft. However, the adopted standards are less inclusive than other drafts and ultimately maintain whiteness.

In this dissertation, I explore the adoption and implementation of high school American History standards in North Carolina using a Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Policy Analysis, with a specific focus on maintenance of whiteness. I find that the adoption of more inclusive standards demonstrates the effectiveness of utilizing the opportunities from a policy window, even when the new policy is challenged by a political spectacle. In my study, I highlight the importance of understanding the relationship between standards, curriculum, and instruction, as teachers play a significant role in interpreting and implementing standards. Recommendations include supporting teachers through comprehensive training on racial literacy and ongoing professional development, as well as preparing for and limiting policy windows that may further restrict the teaching of inclusive history and uphold whiteness.

“FOR WHOM IS THIS DIVISIVE?”: THE PERSISTENCE OF WHITENESS
IN THE ADOPTION OF NC AMERICAN HISTORY
SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

by

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Approved by

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DEDICATION

To all my students – you inspire me every day to work towards a more just, inclusive, antiracist, and liberated world.

Especially in loving memory of Jalen Mills (2003-2022), Isaijah “Skippy” Carrington (2002-2021), Demeico “Meech” Sowell (1999-2020), and all other Knights who have been victims of gun violence. May you all rest in power.

APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions	7
Background	7
Significance of the Study	12
Terminology	13
Terms for Talking About Race and Power.....	13
Whiteness.....	13
Antiracism and Racial Literacy	14
Anti-Blackness.....	14
Inclusion and Diverse/Multiple Perspectives/Viewpoints.....	14
Racial Reckoning.....	15
Discourse and Policy Analysis Language	16
Discourse and Rhetoric.....	16
Policy Window and Political Spectacle	16
Limitations	17
Positionality Statement.....	18
Chapters Overview	20
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	22
Purpose and Types of Social Studies Standards.....	22
Purpose of Social Studies Courses	22
Types of Social Studies Standards	23
Impact of Framing	24
Development of Social Studies Standards	25
Beginnings of Standardization	26

A Nation at Risk	28
No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.....	29
The Trump and Biden Administrations	30
State-Level Debates.....	31
Manifestation of Whiteness and Racism in Education Policy	33
Whiteness and Racism in Education Policy	33
Whiteness and Racism in Social Studies Standards	34
Abstract Liberalism	35
Naturalization	36
Cultural Racism.....	37
Minimization of Race	38
Conclusion.....	40
CHAPTER III: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY	41
Critical Policy Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis.....	41
Multiple Streams Framework	42
Problem Streams	43
Political Stream.....	44
Policy Solutions Stream.....	45
Multiple Streams and CPA	46
Political Spectacle	46
Theoretical Frameworks.....	48
Critical Whiteness Studies.....	48
Critical Race Theory.....	51
Data Collection Methods.....	51
Data Analysis Strategies.....	54
Identifying the Actors.....	59
Trustworthiness	61
Conclusion.....	63
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	64
Key Terminology	64
Overview	65

Four Rhetoric Phases as Responses to Policy Windows and Political Spectacles	66
Phase One: The Purpose of Teaching Social Studies	69
Phase Two: Representation Matters	74
Phase Three: Explicit Language and Indoctrination	78
Phase Four: Frame Stronger Stanadards.....	82
National Influence Through Diffusion, Policy Windows, and Agenda Setting.....	85
Comparison to Other States.....	86
Summer of Racial Reckoning.....	89
President Trump’s Agenda Setting.....	90
Movement Towards Inclusive Language Prior to and During a Policy Window	93
Progress Before Draft Four	94
Changes Surrounding Draft Four	96
Diversity in Supporting Examples.....	98
Presence of Anti-Blackness, Dearth of Antiracism, and Possibilities of Racial Literacy.....	99
Appearances of Anti-Blackness	100
The Dearth of Antiracist Language	103
Racial Literacy.....	104
Not At All Present.....	105
Potentially Present	106
Foundationally Present	107
Whiteness Through Individualism, Monolithic Groups, and Unitive Rhetoric	108
Individualism and the Good/Bad Racist Binary	108
Removal of the Phrases “Systemic” and “Gender”	112
Omission of the Word White.....	114
The Portrayal of Marginalized Groups.....	116
Belief in American History as Unitive	121
Conclusion.....	126
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS.....	127
Discussion	128
The Influence of the NCSBE.....	128
National Policy’s Influence on State-Level Policy	130
Policy Windows and Political Spectacles	130

Limits of National Influence	132
NC Standards as an Example of the National Social Studies Trends	133
Manifestations of Whiteness	135
A Policy Window Creating Progress.....	135
Continuing to Manifest Whiteness	136
Implications	137
Current Debates in North Carolina.....	138
Role of the NC House of Representatives	138
Mark Robinson’s Gubernatorial Run.....	139
Current National Debates	139
Suggestions for Future Research.....	141
Implementation in the Classroom.....	141
Guiding Examples of Inclusive American History Standards.....	142
Recommendations	143
Supporting Teachers	143
Preparing For and Limiting Policy Windows.....	145
Final Thoughts.....	145
Learnings about Policy Windows and Political Spectacles.....	145
Reflection on Implementation of the AHS	147
Conclusion.....	150
REFERENCES	152
APPENDIX A: MATRIX FOR ROUND TWO OF CODING	175
APPENDIX B: CODED DOCUMENTS	177

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Round One of Coding – From Quotes to Themes55

Table 3.2 Matrix for Round Two of Coding from McClure, 2021, pg 23.....56

Table 3.3 Matrix for Round Three of Coding: Characteristics and Behaviors of Racial Literacy.....57

Table 3.4 Identifying the Actors60

Table 4.1 The Different Phases of Rhetoric67

Table 4.2 Changes to AHS from Draft One to Two in the Economics Section.....94

Table 4.3 Changes to Draft Four of the AHS.....96

Table 4.4 Specific References in Suggested Topics by Race/Ethnicity98

Table 4.5 Presence of Racial Literacy Characteristics in Policy Rhetoric and AHS105

Table 4.6 Raceless Examples in Unpacking Document.....114

Table 4.7 AH.E.1.3 and AH.E.1.4 in the Unpacking Document115

Table 4.8 Marginalized Groups in the Civics and Government Strand in the Unpacking Document117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Reflexivity Journal Entry.....	62
Figure 4.1 WRAL’s “Learning Social Studies” Cartoon.....	108
Figure 4.2 Glossary Terms Presented to the NCSBE.....	113

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In September 2020, President Trump created the 1776 Commission to encourage “patriotic” education and combat the “ideological poison” of teaching Critical Race Theory in classes (Solender, 2020). This national policy occurred amidst the debate surrounding the inclusivity of the new high school American History Standards (AHS) in North Carolina. President Trump’s language furthered conservative lawmakers’ agenda to oppose the phrases “systemic racism” and “systemic discrimination” in the AHS (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c). The language of President Trump and North Carolina conservative lawmakers sought to protect whiteness, or the power structure that conveys advantages to the dominant group, by portraying the more inclusive standards as “divisive” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c; Solender, 2020). This rhetoric against inclusive standards and social studies curriculum pushed back against the strides previously made by progressive policymakers and activists in the 2020’s “racial reckoning” (Chang et al., 2020).

During the summer of 2020, North Carolinians watched the racial protests happening across the state and nation and waited to learn what their state officials would decide about in-person learning for the 2020–2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) made a surprising decision to postpone the adoption of the North Carolina social studies courses, including the high school AHS, to ensure that the standards recognized the history of racism in the United States and included multiple and diverse perspectives (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, June 2020a).

The concurrence of the racial reckoning, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the adoption of new AHS challenged the policy status quo (Kingdon, 2011, Rippner, 2016). Prior to May 2020,

North Carolina social studies standards remained the focus of technical experts, such as educators and bureaucrats. During May and June 2020, however, the wider North Carolina public took an interest in the standards and advocated for significant change in the inclusivity of the AHS. The public and NCSBE advocating for more inclusive AHS represented the creation of a policy window, as the problems, solutions, and policy streams all converged (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016).

However, as the adoption process of the standards continued, the NCSBE members changed due to the 2020 election, and President Trump's 1776 Commission continued to bring scrutiny to teaching a more inclusive history. These factors created a political spectacle, or a manufactured crisis, opposing specific language in the social studies standards (Horsford et al., 2019).

In February 2021, the NCSBE adopted Draft Five of the AHS. This draft omitted the words "gender identity" and "systemic racism" because of the political spectacle, but other phrases, such as "marginalized groups," "historically privileged groups," and "systemically denied" remained in the standards (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c).

In this study, I explored how a convergence of political streams created a policy window to displace whiteness in the AHS, and how the following political spectacle maintained this whiteness. To further understand these concepts, this study examined how discourse from the NCSBE and national policy influenced the AHS, and the extent to which this discourse upheld whiteness. Evaluating the displacement and maintenance of whiteness in the AHS is important to understanding how policy windows and discourse can be utilized to create more inclusive social studies standards.

Statement of the Problem

Educational theorist Michael Apple wrote that “Education has once again become a site of crucial struggles over authority and identity, indeed over both the very meaning of being educated and who should control it” (2019, p. 236). Standards are one of the domains in which this struggle is taking place (Apple, 2019). In the last 20 years, contentious debates over standards have occurred in many states, including Missouri, Texas, and Georgia (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Barbour et al., 2007). One common thread throughout these debates is that different political groups have tried to implement reforms to make the standards more inclusive. These attempts, however, received pushback, and the adopted version of the standards portrays a traditional white-dominant historical narrative. Similarly, during the AHS adoption process, reformers pushed for more inclusive standards, and while conservative lawmakers objected to these efforts, the final version of the AHS ultimately portrays a more inclusive version of history than the original.

These debates (e.g., the inclusion of multicultural knowledge and the centering of American Exceptionalism) matter, as standards influence teachers, curriculum, and classroom instruction (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Fore, 1998). Previous studies found that standards influence, to some extent, the content that teachers choose to cover in their course (Grant, 2006; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). When standards are highly specific and prescriptive, teachers feel constrained, as they focus their efforts on teaching content and skills emphasized in the standards (Au, 2009; Dover et al., 2016; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). Standardization frequently forces teachers to select their content to focus on tested material, reallocate instructional time, and emphasize teacher-centered instructional practices (e.g., lecture) (Au, 2007; 2009; 2011; Grant; 2006; Vogler & Virtue, 2007).

One reason why it's important for education policymakers to understand standards is because research indicates that social studies standards influence students' understanding of identities such as race, ethnicity, and language (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Scholars have found that current social studies standards do not adequately or accurately address race and racism in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2003; McClure, 2021; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Rather, social studies standards tend to center whiteness, or an ideology that continues to privilege white people while erasing people of color; promote a master narrative about racial progress; and obscure instances of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2003; McClure, 2021; Vasquez-Heilig et al., 2012). Scholars have argued that centering whiteness in schooling "is an easy method for creating an imagined reality for European Americans and dehumanizing treatment of BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, people of color] Americans" (McClure, 2021, p. 6), which can include the erasure and stereotyping of minoritized groups (An, 2016; Barbour et al., 2007; Conner, 2021; Journell, 2009a; Sabzalian et al., 2021). Curricular erasure creates feelings of alienation for the impacted students (Conner, 2021). This erasure and alienation in standards negatively impact not only marginalized groups, but white people as well, as it continues to "engender violence in the oppressors" and perpetuates "the distortion of being more fully human" (Freire, 1972, p. 4). However, when standards include diverse perspectives, students can develop racial literacy and experience feelings of empowerment (Freire, 1972; Grayson, 2018; Utt, 2018; Wills, 2019).

In this study, I focused on the creation of social studies standards in one state—North Carolina. In February 2021, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) adopted the AHS, which were then implemented in the fall of that year (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). Apple (2019) argues that "The curriculum in schools responds to and

represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere” (p. 47). Other scholars agree that the creation of social studies standards is an inherently ideological process that especially embeds racial politics in the design (Apple, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). In this study, I examined how the creation of the AHS represented the ideological perspectives of elected officials and how the adoption of standards was influenced by both macro and micro political contexts related to race, equity, and power. Understanding the influence of these political contexts on standards in North Carolina adds to the literature examining the contentious process of adopting state social studies standards throughout the United States (Barbour et al., 2007; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Fore, 1998; Placier et al., 2002).

The discussion over systemic racism exemplifies how the rhetoric of the NCSBE centers whiteness. North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson and North Carolina State Superintendent Catherine Truitt opposed the idea that racism is “systemic.” Rather, they believed that racism was an individual experience for people. While progressive NCSBE members argued for more inclusive language, such as “systemic racism” and “systemic discrimination,” the AHS excluded this language because of conservative NCSBE members’ belief in the individualistic nature of racism (Childress, 2021). Given the long history of slavery within the United States, Jim Crow laws, the brutal treatment of people of color during the Civil Rights Movement, voter disenfranchisement, police brutality, etc., it is crucial that issues such as systemic racism are explicitly named in standards to push back against what I see as the systemic nature of whiteness. Even though the NCSBE had the opportunity to include this language, they instead joined other state social studies standards in obscuring the extent of racism in the United States and continuing to marginalize the experiences of people of color (McClure, 2021; Vasquez-Heilig et al., 2012).

In this study, I explored how rhetoric promoting individualistic ideologies and other forms of whiteness, such as those belonging to State Superintendent Truitt and Lieutenant Governor Robinson, impacted the creation of the AHS and how the AHS maintains whiteness. By viewing the creation of the AHS through the lens of a policy window and political spectacle, I sought to understand the convergence of factors that allow for ideologies to influence standards in contentious debates. While this study centered on North Carolina and the AHS, the phenomena that are central to this study, such as policy windows, controversy over social studies standards, and whiteness in social studies standards, occur in many other contexts throughout the United States.

Purpose of the Study

I examined the influence of whiteness on the ways standards are adopted and on the language of the standards themselves. I also explored the way elected officials exert power through rhetoric. In addition, I studied the extent to which a policy window and political spectacle impact the implementation of policies that sought to displace whiteness. By studying these central phenomena, I wanted to understand how policy windows, political spectacles, and rhetoric can be used to advocate for or hamper the creation of more inclusive social studies standards.

In this study, I explored whether and how the various iterations of the AHS work to disrupt or maintain whiteness. Through analysis of the changing language of the standards, I examined how each draft either sought to promote a color-evasive version of history or incorporated BIPOC Americans as major contributors to America's history and acknowledged systemic examples of oppression (McClure, 2021).

To understand the different actors and factors at play, I conducted an extensive document analysis and focused on local and national politics that had an outsize influence on the adoption of the AHS. The documents I analyzed included, but were not limited to, NCDPI meeting minutes, press conferences, media reports, and the North Carolina Unpacking Document for American History. The NCDPI created the Unpacking Document—which provides examples, mastery objectives, topics, activities, and assessments—to help educators better understand the intention of the standards. My analysis of these documents helped to clarify the relationships between local and national policy rhetoric and the adoption of the AHS in North Carolina.

Research Questions

My overarching research question was: “How do policy windows shape the way educational policy actors maintain or disrupt whiteness during a standards adoption process?” Embedded within this study were several sub-questions that resulted from the overarching question. These questions were:

1. How did rhetoric within the NCSBE influence the AHS?
2. How did national-level policy rhetoric influence state-level policy rhetoric?
3. How did the AHS and state-level policy rhetoric maintain or disrupt whiteness?

Background

In 2019, the North Carolina General Assembly passed House Bill 924 (HB 924) to realign high school social studies course requirements. This realignment condensed American history into one course instead of two (the previously taught American History I and American History II) and created a newly required personal finance course. Initially, the new American history course debate focused on whether it was appropriate to condense the number of required history courses in exchange for a personal finance course (Childress, 2019; Guillory, 2020).

Lawmakers added the personal finance course with the intent to ensure students knew how to manage a personal budget, demonstrating the state’s view of education to produce productive citizens (Guillory, 2020). While creating the AHS, however, policymakers also debated the amount of inclusiveness in the standards (Ward & Buchanan, 2021). Specifically, they discussed how the AHS portrayed issues like “involuntary migration,” “American Exceptionalism,” and the “racial wealth gap” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a).

The NCDPI formed a committee to create new standards for each social studies course as part of the realignment, including 37 writers and 42 reviewers from across the state (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). According to NCSBE policy SCOS-012, the course standards go through a two-stage revision process, with time for public feedback after both Draft One and Draft Two (NC State Board of Education, 2018). The NCDPI encouraged any North Carolinians to comment through a Google website, which the public was informed of through “listservs, webinars, social media, and other forms of communication” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). Under the policy, the committee then recommends a third draft of standards for adoption to the NCDPI, where it is voted on by the NCSBE (NC State Board of Education, 2018). The NCDPI scheduled the committee to present Draft Three of the standards to be recommended for adoption to the NCSBE in June 2020. The NCDPI released Draft One of the standards for feedback on December 13, 2019, and they were available for public comment until February 15, 2020. Between Draft One and Draft Two, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States, and most schools in North Carolina closed for virtual learning. The focus of the NCSBE shifted to the logistics of reopening schools and delaying implementation of the new standards to allow teachers time to adjust after the pandemic (Pogarcic, 2020a; 2020b).

The NCDPI released Draft Two of the standards on April 7, 2020, and they were available for public comment until April 27, 2020. The committee revised Draft Two into Draft Three based on public comments, including specific feedback received on the extent that the standards provided accurate inclusion of all voices (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). Policy SCOS-012 intended this to be the final version, with a planned vote from the NCSBE in June 2020 (NC State Board of Education, 2018).

However, between public comments of Draft Two and the presentation of Draft Three to the NCSBE, police officers murdered George Floyd and national protests occurred. Floyd, a Black man in Minnesota, died on May 25, 2020, when police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck. The video of Floyd's murder was widely circulated and sparked racial protests across the country. While Black people are frequently killed by police officers in America, the timing and cruelty of Floyd's death captured national attention as racial tensions were already boiling from the death of Ahmaud Arbury and Breonna Taylor. In May 2020, many Americans had pent-up anger and rage after 2.5 months of isolation resulting from the pandemic lockdown. Compounding this anger was that COVID-19 disproportionately impacted the Black community's health and economic outcomes (Altman, 2020; Chang et al., 2020). The Trump presidency further built the context for these racial protests, as then-President Trump repeatedly used his office to further racial division, through actions such as using racial insults against American Congresswomen of color, fueling anti-Asian hate, and taking "both sides" after a white supremacy march (Altman, 2020; Hart, 2021; Merica, 2017; Naylor, 2019). This combination of factors led to widescale unrest, which America had not seen at such a size since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (Altman, 2020; Blake, 2021; Quarcoo & Husaković, 2021).

With the summer of racial reckoning, members of DPI readjusted the timeline to ensure the standards included minoritized groups and requested a Draft Four and Draft Five, with another period of public feedback between the drafts. Based on documents, members of the NCDPI desired to delay standards adoption and to change them to help North Carolina meet the “current moment” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). While the standards writing committee previously asked for feedback on inclusion, the new national awareness of defining racism as an urgent problem instead of simply a condition, especially for white people, created a change in streams, producing a new policy window (Blake, 2021; Kingdon, 2011).

The board recognized they could make requests about the language and the intent of standards, but if they pushed too much on making standards specifically worded and on an exhaustive list of historical events, they would be creating a curriculum, which is outside of their duties (Pogarcic, 2020b). In July 2020, the NCDPI announced the formal timeline readjustment, which included a fourth version of the standards to add explicit language that articulates the experiences of all people (Childress, 2021).

The NCDPI released Draft Four on November 16, 2020, and they were available for public feedback until December 4, 2020. Of the 7,000 people who responded to the public feedback survey, 85% favored adoption (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021a). Before the board voting on adoption of Draft Four, the 2020 election and 2021 inauguration shifted NCDPI leadership. Mark Robinson, a Republican, became North Carolina lieutenant governor and Catherine Truitt, also a Republican, became the state superintendent (Childress, 2021; Granados, 2021a). In the January 2021 board meeting, members that asked for more inclusive standards supported Draft Four. James Ford, an NCSBE member, voiced his support for Draft

Four because he believed the standards better-represented students of color, who make up most North Carolina public school students (Granados, 2021a).

While Draft Four standards received more support than previous drafts, several members of the NCSBE opposed these standards, primarily because of phrases such as “gender identity” and “systemic racism” (Childress, 2021; Granados, 2021a). Robinson, the state’s first Black lieutenant governor, stated: “These divisive standards consistently separate Americans into groups to undermine our unity. The proposed standards indoctrinate our students against our great country and our founders” (Childress, 2021). State Superintendent Truitt opposed the inquiry strand of the standards, which are contentless standards for any secondary social studies course that focused on crafting questions, making claims, and presenting arguments. State Superintendent Truitt felt that the inquiry standards were not specifically focused enough on social studies. With conflicting feelings about Draft Four, the board decided to hear another version of the standards at the end of January 2021 (Granados, 2021a). The change in policy actors on the NCSBE highlighted the importance of understanding the AHS debate through a lens of political streams, and Lieutenant Governor Robinson’s focus on inclusive standards as a crisis brought elements of a political spectacle to the debate (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011)

Draft Five was presented to the NCDPI in February 2021 and the terms “systemic racism” and “systemic discrimination” were changed to “racism” and “discrimination,” respectively (Childress, 2021; Granados, 2021b). Lieutenant Governor Robinson still did not support the standards because he believed they created a negative tone, while State Superintendent Truitt supported the changes because she believed that multiple forms of racism, discrimination, and identity could exist. NCSBE member Ford, who championed Draft Four, felt

that the changes made the standards indirect and dishonest concerning America's history (Granados, 2021). Despite the debate, the board voted along party lines and adopted Draft Five of the standards in February 2021 and implemented them in August 2021 (Childress, 2021).

The back-and-forth process of adopting the standards indicated that there could larger political factors that influenced NCSBE decisions. A key part of understanding the changing drafts of the standards is examining to what extent a policy window opened to promote more inclusive standards and the extent that a political spectacle followed the window as a reaction to progressive politics (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011). In this dissertation, I completed a critical policy analysis (CPA) of the standards and discourse around their creation to examine how policy actors' discourse and social studies standards can disrupt or maintain whiteness, especially in the context of national moods about racism.

Significance of the Study

Young and Reynolds (2017), critical education policy researchers, argue that state boards of education are “significantly underrepresented with the educational research literature” (p. 19). Most studies on state boards of education have focused on their organization and structure, as well as taking a traditional policy approach to understanding their influence. In contrast to the research on state boards of education, the media has shown a growing interest in their role (Young and Reynolds, 2017). Through this study, I added to a growing body of literature on the relationship between state boards of education and their influence on standards development with a critical perspective (Fore, 1998; Fogo, 2015; Noboa, 2011; Young and Reynolds, 2017).

It is important to note that while the NCDPI creates classroom standards, teachers can act as “street-level” policy actors. This means that teachers have the latitude to transform what the standards codify and have the agency to dismantle the maintenance of whiteness when they

create and implement the classroom's curriculum (Barbour et al., 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Horsford et al., 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). However, my goal was not to provide suggestions for an antiracist curriculum or to examine how teachers implement the standards in their classrooms. With a critical policy praxis perspective—an approach that blends scholarship and activism—I hope that if teachers better understand how whiteness manifests itself in state-level educational standards, they can then create and plan for a more just and liberatory curriculum for their students (Dover et al., 2016; Grayson, 2018; Horsford et al., 2019; Reinhard, 2014).

Terminology

To clarify my conceptualization of central phenomena and ideas that I explore in this study, this section provides how I define and understand key terminology.

Terms for Talking About Race and Power

Whiteness

I center whiteness in this study because whiteness is a dominant means of social hierarchy. I define whiteness as a power structure and social system that creates advantages, such as representation for the dominant group, while denying those same advantages to historically marginalized groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Harris, 1993; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; Utt, 2018). As critical race theorist Cheryl Harris writes, “Whiteness is an aspect of racial identity surely, but it is much more; it remains a concept based on relations of power, a social construct predicated on white dominance and Black subordination” (1993, p. 1761). The American Psychological Association (APA) style guide calls for the capitalization of racial and ethnic groups as they are proper nouns (American Psychological Association, 2020). While whiteness is a function of race, whiteness is not a proper noun and many critical whiteness

scholars write about whiteness starting with a lowercase letter (Harris, 1993; Hytten & Adkins, 2001). I chose to do the same in this study.

Antiracism and Racial Literacy

I conceptualized antiracism as values and practices that advance racial equity (Diem & Welton, 2021). One cannot be “not racist,” as that still upholds white supremacy; one instead must constantly engage in critical self-reflection and work to dismantle oppressive policies (Kendi, 2019). This active work against white supremacy constitutes antiracism (Diem & Welton, 2021; Kendi, 2019). One way education policy actors can engage in antiracism is through racial literacy, which is a practice that develops criticality for discussing race (Grayson, 2018)

Anti-Blackness

In my data analysis, I conceptualized anti-Blackness as an ideology that works alongside whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018). While whiteness justifies itself as the dominant ideology, anti-Blackness is when “the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and [w]hite” (Dumas & Ross, 2016, 416-417). In education, anti-Blackness results in white supremacy continually excluding Black children (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Inclusion and Diverse/Multiple Perspectives/Viewpoints

When talking about inclusion and inclusive standards, I intentionally referred to practices and language that seek to accurately represent and center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well the LGBTQ+ community and other historically marginalized communities (Learning for Justice, 2023). Journell (2008) states that “Trying to create perfect standards is a futile endeavor as no set of standards can ever be entirely inclusive” (p. 40). For

this study, I used the phrase “inclusive standards” to refer to how standards may attempt to provide this representation.

In my study, I observed how members of the NCSBE and the media used the phrase “diverse/multiple perspectives/viewpoints.” This language aligns with creating inclusive standards, as the implication of wanting diverse perspectives is wanting to include more about the experiences of historically marginalized groups (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). However, at other times, as seen in this study, this language is manipulated to further marginalize Blackness by encouraging the incorporation of differing white viewpoints (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a).

Racial Reckoning

While scholars, the media, and other advocates have not reached a consensus on how to label the 2020 summer protests following the murder of George Floyd, I used the label “summer of racial reckoning.” *NPR, CNN, The Washington Post, Educational Theory, The Brookings Institute, The Carnegie Endowment, and Fordham University*—all reputable and highly regarded organizations—use, reference, or critique this term (Bacon, 2023; Blake, 2021; Chang et al., 2020; Chow, 2020; Henry-Nickie & Dews, 2021; Hytten & Stemhagen, 2021; Quarcoo & Husaković, 2021). I recognize that the protests during 2020 did not erase systemic inequities and create retribution for America’s history of racial injustice, as the term “reckoning” might imply (Blake, 2021; Bacon, 2023). However, the term “racial reckoning” was widely used and, therefore, appropriate to convey the unrest occurring amid the creation of the AHS.

Discourse and Policy Analysis Language

Discourse and Rhetoric

In this study, I defined discourse as semiotic practices that are context-dependent and shaped by institutional, cultural, and social practices. Discourse can include written text, spoken language, visual images, and symbols (Horsford et al., 2019; Fairclough, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). When using the term “discourse,” I am not referring to a specific ideology, but instead to anything that can be used to communicate any ideology (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). I defined rhetoric as the strategic use of language to influence policy and uphold a specific ideology. Rhetoric is language intentionally constructed to influence an individual’s understanding of the world and seeks to inspire action (Winton, 2013). While discourse refers to all documents and language used, regardless of ideology, rhetoric refers to intentional language to promote a particular ideology (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Winton, 2013).

Policy Window and Political Spectacle

In this study, I used policy window to describe an opportunity for advocates of certain problems and policies to garner attention for their agenda and possibly have their policy implemented (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011). A policy window is created when conditions are labeled “problems,” when aligned elected officials are in office, and when policy specialists have an alternative proposal (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011).

Closely related is the notion of a political spectacle, which is a phrase to describe how conditions become understood as problems through public discourse and manufacturing crises (Edelman, 1998; Horsford et al., 2019). A political spectacle may not lead to a change in policy implementation like a policy window, but it can be the start of conditions creating a policy window.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the documents collected may be incomplete (Creswell, 2016). I only evaluated the new American history course standards and compared them to earlier North Carolina AHS drafts from the adoption process. While I examined how the maintenance and disruption of whiteness changed as the NCSBE debated the standards, I did not contextualize the manifestation of whiteness in previous North Carolina American history courses.

Additionally, I only examined the American history course for high school and did not code the documents for elementary and middle school social studies courses, nor did I for the other high school social studies courses. The NCSBE adopted the entire sequence of standards, so some of the debate and rhetoric from the meetings, such as the phrase “gender identity,” occurred in other standards and not the AHS. My expertise and experience lie in high school American history courses, which is part of the reason for making this selection. Additionally, I wanted to take a “depth over breadth” approach and provide intense scrutiny to all five versions of the AHS. I realized adding more courses would limit my ability to do this.

When analyzing policy actors’ rhetoric, I only had access to what is publicly available. I was not privy to policy discussions that occurred in private. While I thoroughly searched meeting minutes and news articles, a comprehensive list of every meeting, interview, and press conference on the AHS does not exist. There is a possibility that I may have missed some reports that could add additional insight into policy actors’ understanding of the standards and ideological beliefs.

I also chose not to conduct interviews with the board and elected officials. I made this choice due to time constraints and accessibility. I view the shaping of the AHS policy as part of a political spectacle, which emphasizes the media’s role in constructing events as crises and

politicizing the public (Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2018). Viewing the AHS as a political spectacle means understanding politics as a performative construction of reality, so I chose to emphasize the publicly available discourse that documented this performance (Anderson, 2007; Carpenter, 2017; Koyama & Kania, 2014)

Another limitation of this study was that the focus was only on standards and not on the enacted curriculum. While standards have some influence on what teachers choose to do in the classroom, teachers are still street-level policy actors who may choose to add content or omit standards in their curriculum (Dover et al., 2016; Goldstein, 2008). Even if a teacher wants to use the AHS to bring more diverse voices into their classroom, ingrained classroom habits could prevent them from fully integrating the new standards (Cohen, 1990). These teachers' choices could significantly alter the extent that the curriculum upholds whiteness in the classroom across the state.

Positionality Statement

Critical scholars are encouraged to describe their positionality to situate themselves in the research and recognize that one's social location will impact their research, such as the selection of theoretical frameworks and methods, as well as the interpretation of the data and findings (Diem & Young, 2017; Stanton, 2019).

I describe myself as a white teacher at a majority BIPOC school. Currently, I am a humanities teacher and Dean of Curriculum and Instruction at a private school for families of limited economic means. Our student demographics are approximately 70% Hispanic, 25% Black, and 5% mixed. In my role, I am constantly seeking to ensure that the curriculum in my classroom and other classrooms in our school reflects our students' identities.

When starting this project, I was teaching American history at a North Carolina Title I majority BIPOC school. During the 2021–2022 school year, I taught the new American history course during both semesters. I also led my school’s American History Professional Learning Community, which was the teacher working group to design this course’s curriculum. Additionally, I was part of the team that created the district’s implementation guide for the new AHS.

My former school is located on the property of a former plantation. Freed people leaving the plantation established one of the neighborhoods within the school’s attendance zone. Systemic inequities frequently deny students from this neighborhood the opportunities readily available in predominantly white schools. The remnants and repercussions of chattel slavery are apparent in the everyday lives of the students and families I serve, and I am inspired to act as a “co-conspirator” in the fight for justice (Love, 2019). I seek to use a curriculum that explains my students’ everyday realities instead of upholding white supremacy.

I recognize that while I am dedicated to the fight of being a co-conspirator, I am still immersed in whiteness as part of my everyday life. I am committed to unlearning and relearning beliefs and assumptions to be an antiracist partner (DiAngelo, 2018). One part of living this racially just praxis is naming whiteness and its harm while empowering myself and other educators to dismantle this system (DiAngelo, 2018; Freire, 1972; Love, 2019; Utt, 2018). Critical whiteness scholar Cheryl Matias’ explanation of the urgency of critical whiteness work best describes my feelings. She states that “As educational race researchers, we do this scholarship because we are passionate about changing how education treats students of color, teachers of color, and people of color” (2022, p. 697).

As a current classroom teacher and scholar, I strive to embody a “critical policy praxis.” In a critical policy praxis, one does not silo their scholarly knowledge or their practical experiences, but instead allows each to inform the other (Horsford et al., 2019). Having taught the AHS course and developing a district curriculum guide, my experience with the standards impacts this research, and my research impacts how I implement the standards in my classroom.

While exploring standards and the accurate teaching of history, I am considering “truth” instead of “Truth.” Many truths exist, especially historically, and our understanding of these truths is based on systems of power. Understanding these truths and discourse can help answer “What are just standards and curriculum?” (Sipe & Constable, 1996).

Chapters Overview

In this chapter, I provided the background of my study, as well as described the problem, purpose, and significance of the study on how policy actors use policy windows and political spectacles when adopting social standards. I also recognized the limitations of this study. I defined key terminology that I will use in this dissertation to clarify how I am conceptualizing phrases about race, policy, and discourse. I provided my positionality as a white North Carolina American history classroom teacher to improve transparency about my critical policy praxis.

In the next chapter, I provide a literature review to familiarize readers with existing research related to my topic. I examine literature on the different purposes of social studies courses and framing of the standards. I then move into the development of social studies standards on the national level, as well as discuss studies on contentious state-level adoption of social studies standards. I end by reviewing literature on whiteness in education policy, with a particular focus on other studies examining the inclusion of marginalized experiences in American History standards.

In Chapter Three, I explain my methods for this study. I provide an explanation of my use of Critical Policy Analysis and Critical Discourse analysis as a methods framework, with a particular focus on how these align with Kingdon's (2011) policy windows theory and Edelman's (1988) political spectacle theory. I also discuss Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory, which served as my theoretical framework. I finish this chapter discussing how I gathered documents, coded discourse, identified policy actors, and established trustworthiness in this study.

In Chapter Four, I present the findings from my analysis. I explain how the adoption process occurred in four phases to better identify the occurrence of a policy window and political spectacle. I also examine how national policy influence the AHS adoption process. I end by examining how race and whiteness appear in the standards and NCSBE rhetoric.

In Chapter Five, I analyze my findings by answering each of my research questions and re-entering literature into the conversation. I also discuss implications of this study and offer recommendations on how the findings from this study can promote a more inclusive teaching of American History.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature to provide a context for my study. I examine how there are differing debates on the purpose of social studies and how the framing of social studies standards impacts their influence. I then provide background on the history of national policy towards social studies standards, as well as examples of other contentious state social studies standards adoption processes. I end this section discussing how whiteness manifests in education and detail other studies' findings on whiteness in social studies standards.

Purpose and Types of Social Studies Standards

Contemporary scholars see social studies courses as an educational policy arena where negotiating a social order occurs (Freire, 1972; Ladson-Billings, 2003). The extent that which social studies standards prescribe this social order depends on the framing of the standards (Bernstein, 1975; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). My review of the literature revealed how the purpose of social studies courses and the framing of social studies standards have evolved over time.

Purpose of Social Studies Courses

The National Council for Social Studies defines social studies as any discipline related to “anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology” (*Introduction*, n.d.). Both NC DPI and the National Council for Social Studies conceptualize the purpose of social studies as creating well-rounded and productive citizens who are ready to engage in democracy (*Introduction*, n.d.; NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). In addition to creating strong citizens, many believe the purpose of social studies is to prepare students to participate in the economy. Placier et al. (2002) says “The

dominant discourse in education policy has been social efficiency. Centrist politicians...and their business allies support standards that represent economically useful knowledge” (p. 283).

Social studies standards and courses influence students’ understanding of their national identity, government, and social order (Au, 2009; Dover et al., 2016; Wills, 2019). For example, social studies courses shape national identity by creating consensus narratives and defining who is “American” based on whom standards include and exclude in the content (Hilburn et al., 2016). Other scholars see social studies courses as influencing democracy, social justice, and inclusion (Dover et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Wills (2019), an education researcher focusing on collective memory, envisions social studies courses as a place to study race, racialization, and systemic racism. By helping students better understand these concepts, social studies courses can better prepare students to interact critically with race in society. In these conceptions, social studies courses are a unique subject because the courses have the explicit charge to create productive citizens, allowing teachers and students to act as societal changemakers (Au, 2009; Dover et al., 2016; Wills, 2019).

Types of Social Studies Standards

To understand social studies standards, scholars differentiate between a weak versus strong framing. “Weak” framing means that teachers and students retain a large amount of control in the sense-making process and selection of materials. A weak frame opposes strongly framed or scripted standards (Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Sleeter and Stillman define a “strong” frame as standards that expect teachers to transmit a more prescribed set of facts (2005). A “weak” frame is a broader standard that allows teachers and students to focus on skills and encourages them to develop their own understanding (Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

Impact of Framing

Both forms of framing have limitations. Studies have found that a strong frame is associated more with rote memorization and preparation for high stakes testing of the prescriptive curriculum (Au, 2007; 2009; Dover et al., 2016; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). The prescriptive curriculum and high-stakes tests rarely value multicultural knowledge, pushing diverse content out of the classroom (Au, 2009; Hilburn et al., 2016; McClure, 2021). The narrow nature of a strongly framed standards can create challenges for teachers to enact social justice pedagogies in this classroom (Dover et al., 2016; McClure, 2021). Besides maintaining power through dictating knowledge, a strong frame dictates to teachers and students their place in the power hierarchy by minimizing their degree of control (Bernstein, 1975; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Vogler & Virtue, 2007).

In contrast, studies have found that a “weak” frame frequently relies on teachers emphasizing inquiry, historical thinking, and skills-based learning in their classrooms (Au, 2007; 2009; Journell, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). When teachers require students to use skills and learn inquiry, they move away from a focus on rote memorization of historical facts, which generally asks students to inquire into a consensus version of history (Apple, 2019; Au, 2009; Journell, 2009b; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). For instance, in the 2001 California Social Studies Standards, students were asked to analyze how waves of hostility towards immigrants have led to restrictive immigration policies. When faced with this type of task, students are not actually analyzing and generating new ideas but instead comprehending information (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Standards, such as this California one, do not ask students to consider more critical inquiry questions such as “why a particular form of social collectivity exists, how it is maintained, and who benefits from it” (Apple, 2019, p. 6). By providing the analysis in the

standards and limiting the scope of the inquiry, even a weak-framed inquiry standard can maintain traditional power structures (Apple, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

A weak framed standard leaves more room for interpretation, even when asking for limited analysis. Social studies teachers with a social justice orientation can better focus on liberatory education while still aligning their instruction with standards (Dover et al., 2016; Grant, 2006; Reinhard, 2014). While the room for interpretation can displace whiteness, the broad nature of the standards can leave gaps (Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2008). If the standards remain too broad, they may not address racism, suggesting that race is not important to social studies (Ladson-Billings, 2003; McClure, 2021). If teachers lack a social justice orientation or racial literacy, they may not cover topics of race in their classrooms. Teachers may not cover the topics without standard requirements because many teachers experience discomfort when discussing race with their students (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Grayson, 2018; McClure, 2021; Ward & Buchanan, 2021).

Differentiating between framing styles is essential for interrogating whiteness in standards. While extremely strong or extremely weak framing poses issues with displacing whiteness in the classroom, I argue that “the way individual states frame their standards may act as the most salient determinant of the way certain topics are handled in the classroom” (Journell, 2008, p. 41).

Development of Social Studies Standards

Scholars argue that creating social studies standards is a political act (Apple, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). The history and politics of social studies standards in the United States demonstrate that political aims, particularly around building a

national identity, undercut the standards movement from the beginning of standardization to a Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and the Trump and Biden administration.

Beginnings of Standardization

From the end of the American Revolution to the late nineteenth century, history teaching in the American classroom focused on Ancient Greece and Rome, the heroes of the American Revolution, and the discovery of the “New World” (Evans, 2004; Grant; 2006; Saxe, 1991). Concern about the incoherent nature of these lessons inspired the National Education Association to establish the Committee of Ten in 1894 (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The Committee of Ten “wanted to bring some order to the hodgepodge of high school curriculum and to standardize preparation for higher education” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 49). This effort to standardize the curriculum followed the progressive spirit of the time, as the movement emphasized standardization and efficiency as seen in factories and was a reaction to the industrial revolution (Evans, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw national movements to codify social studies standards from organizations that endure today. Following the Committee of Ten, the National Education Association and American Historical Association created subsequent reports and committees (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In 1896, the American Historical Association, at the request of the National Education Association. Created to recommend college entrance requirements for history, the Committee of Seven’s report proposed blocking history into four chronological courses: 1. Ancient history, 2. Medieval history, 3. English history, & 4. American history (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). Continuing the spirit of progressivism, The 1916 Report of the Social Studies Committee expanded upon the Committee

of Seven's ideas but called for more emphasis on American history and democracy in history courses (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1992). Some education professors recognize this report as highly influential because the recommended structures for social studies courses would serve as the norm for standards for almost 100 years (Dover et al., 2016; Evans, 2004). Other education professors claim that centering the creation of social studies courses on this committee obscures social studies' complex real-world development before 1916 (Saxe, 1991; Saxe, 1992). In 1921, the National Council for Social Studies was formed to maximize the results of citizenship and history education, and the term "social studies" became popularized (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1991). While the 1930s saw social studies courses focus on social welfare, World War II shifted the emphasis of the courses to citizenship and democracy (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1992).

In the 1950s, amid the Cold War and the launch of Sputnik, the public felt increasing fears about the shortcomings of the American educational system (Evans, 2004; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In response, the government focused on pouring money and attention into science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction. However, the social studies education movement also received attention to increase patriotism (Byford & Russell, 2007; Evans, 2004; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The 1958 National Defense Education Act introduced the idea of national standards for social studies and other items and signaled government involvement in social studies standards (Byford & Russell, 2007; Kenna & Russell, 2018). The Cold War shift from viewing social studies as promoting a progressive education to promoting democracy and patriotism illustrates the changing ideological purpose of social studies (Byford & Russell, 2007; Evans, 2004).

A Nation at Risk

The National Defense Education Act laid the foundation for the influential report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, in 1983 (Au, 2009; Evans, 2004; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This report, commissioned under the Reagan administration during the Cold War, argued that mediocrity in the education system could threaten the future of the United States (Au, 2009; Evans, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). *A Nation at Risk* recommended standards, including in social studies, to improve education quality and increase literacy rates and test scores, ultimately strengthening the American economy and democracy (Au, 2009; Evans, 2004; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). These recommendations in this report shifted curricula and standards from being a local responsibility to increasing state power (Fore, 1998; Placier et al., 2002). By the mid-1980s, most states, including North Carolina, had developed social studies standards, though there was considerable variation across the states (Grant, 2006).

Reacting to *A Nation at Risk*, following presidential administrations issued initiatives for improving education in America (Au, 2009; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). Each of these reforms placed an increased emphasis on standards and testing. In 1994, the National Council for Social Studies Education created a national model framework for social studies standards in response to the standards movement (Evans, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2003). This national framework received criticism for focusing too much on multiculturalism instead of patriotism, and the ideological battle led to a revised, watered-down version (Evans, 2004). This battle is just one example of how politics can impact what schools do.

President George H.W. Bush's *America 2000* advocated for grades that demonstrated a student's proficiency in history (Au, 2009; Evans, 2004; Kenna & Russell, 2018). This plan was

a national strategy instead of federal policy, calling for federal-state partnerships, with federal standards being voluntary and states having the flexibility to create their standards (Kenna & Russell, 2018). Notably, the plan only sought to improve proficiency in history, and with its emphasis on math and literacy, *America 2000* no longer recognized social studies as a core subject (Evans, 2004; Saxe, 1992). In *Goals 2000*, President Clinton strengthened the partnership between states and the federal by providing the funding for states to create standards in history. Forty-seven states received funding from this program, but *Goals 2000* lacked strenuous and precise requirements, so few of these states developed rigorous standards and still received funding (Kenna & Russell, 2018).

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This landmark bill increased the federal government's involvement in education by emphasizing accountability and standards (Au, 2007; 2009; Kenna & Russell, 2018; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). However, states retained control of their standards (Kenna & Russell, 2018). While NCLB omitted social studies from being a federally mandated test, scholars emphasize that some states included social studies in their testing and passed more content-specific social studies standards as a reaction to No Child Left Behind (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). In this era of high-stakes testing, social studies courses became a way to prepare for testing by emphasizing rote memorization and multiple-choice questions, increasing fact-driven history instruction (Au, 2009; 2009; Vogler & Vice, 2007).

Congress failed to reauthorize No Child Left Behind in 2007, and in 2009, President Obama authorized the Race to the Top initiative. While Race to the Top had several policy aims, one goal encouraged states to adopt new college and career standards. A state-led effort to create

these standards formed and led to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Forty-five states adopted the Common Core Standards to receive Race to the Top funding or No Child Left Behind waivers. With their emphasis on literacy, the Common Core Standards led to further emphasis on social studies standards. However, states still maintained a great deal of autonomy (Kenna & Russell, 2018; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012;). The National Council for Social Studies adopted the Common Core Standards into the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework. This framework seeks to empower students in various facets of life through social studies (An, 2016; Dover et al., 2016; Reinhard, 2014). Race to the Top, and subsequently the Common Core movement, signaled a new age in federal involvement with social study standards with specific historical literacy skills. Additionally, this marked a change in policy with a new emphasis on literacy and critical thinking, as opposed to the earlier emphasis on rote memorization (Dover et al., 2016; Reinhard, 2014).

The Trump and Biden Administrations

Since the election of Donald Trump and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, states have gained more control over their standards. All 50 states have developed or adopted social studies standards, but as of 2018, only 21 states have testing associated with these standards (Kenna & Russell, 2018). Even with his emphasis on state control of standards, in 2020, President Trump signed an executive order creating the 1776 Commission to promote “patriotic” education. Trump viewed patriotic education as necessary because of the “left-wing indoctrination” happening in schools due to the publication of the 1619 Project and what some believed was the use of Critical Race Theory in K-12 classrooms (Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Solender, 2020; Smith, 2021). The result of this commission was the 1776 Report, which

reassessed history from a conservative side. However, this report received substantial criticism, with the American Historical Association calling it simplistic and slanted.

Within hours of taking office, President Biden signed an executive order rescinding the 1776 Report (Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Smith, 2021). While Biden acknowledged responding “to the call of history” in his inaugural address, he has not formed his education commission on history (Smith, 2021). President Biden’s education plan centers around equity for all students. While he lays out plans for increasing diversity and funding for schools, he omits standards and testing from his plans (Fact Sheet, 2021). This omission can only signal that state-based standardization of social studies courses will remain in place.

Even with President Biden rescinding the 1776 Report, several conservative state legislatures have modeled legislation after Trump’s executive order. According to Kaplan and Owings (2021), “As of July 2021, at least 28 states had proposed or passed legislation or taken other serious action intended to restrict how teachers discuss racism, sexism, and other “divisive” topics and limit diversity training” (p. 1). The debate between President Trump and Biden does signal that even with state control of social studies standards, the debate about what constitutes “real history”, and CRT is a national debate.

While existing literature has explored how the debate over CRT in social studies has occurred on a national level, there is limited research on how this national debate is influencing states’ standards adoption process.

State-Level Debates

As states have emphasized high-quality social studies standards since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the adoption of these standards has been filled with controversy (Barbour et al., 2007; Fogo, 2015; Fore, 1992; Placier et al., 2002). In Virginia, former Governor Allen clashed

with social studies educators when advocating to implement a curriculum that heavily emphasized traditional knowledge. Ultimately, the Virginia State Board of Education adopted this curriculum (Fore, 1992). In 1996 teachers in a designated work group in Missouri attempted to write standards that promoted equity and gave equal status to process and content but the effort was overtaken by politicians (Placier et al., 2002). In 2010, the Texas State Board of Education adopted new social studies standards with a “decidedly Christian conservative bias” (Noboa, 2011, n.p.). Critics who opposed the changes argued these new standards “were politically biased and that it would make it impossible to factually reflect history” (Utt, 2018, p. 19).

Of notable exception, the adoption of *The History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public* in 1995 lacked major controversy about the tone and purpose of the standards, but still included some debates over content, such as including Sitting Bull and Sacagawea (Fogo, 2015).

All of the studies examining these adoption process find that these state-level debates continually include questions over the purpose of the standards, the framing of the standards, the interdisciplinary nature of the standards, the inclusion of certain content, the nature of American exceptionalism, and the role of politicians versus social studies experts in determining the outcome (Barbour et al., 2007; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Fogo, 2015; Fore, 1992; Placier et al., 2002). Placier et al.’s (2002) study of the adoption of the 1996 Missouri standards exemplifies how many of these debates center around the role of politicians, notions of inclusion, exceptionalism, and the interdisciplinary nature of standards. In this example, the expert standards writing group was advised by a political consultant to avoid all “red flag terms,” including the term “collaborate” because it might promote a cooperative communist worldview

and “stewardship” because it is an environmental term (Placier et al., 2002, p. 295). In 2007, during the re-writing of the Missouri standards, Cuenca and Hawkman (2019) found that the debate continued over issues such as “purpose, audience, and specificity” (p. 66).

Manifestation of Whiteness and Racism in Education Policy

As emphasized in the previous section, many studies have found that policymakers typically believe that social studies education impacts America’s democratic society (Dover et al., 2016; Evans, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Saxe, 1992). Even more, as Hytten & Stemhagen (2021) state, “There is fairly broad agreement across the political spectrum that among the central purposes of public schools is to teach *about* and *for* democracy” (p. 183).

Yet, scholars now argue that in our current conceptions of democracy, one cannot separate America’s democratic society from race and whiteness (Glaude, 2016; Hytten & Stemhagen, 2021). In a society entrenched in whiteness, or all the practices that convey privilege to the white dominant group, it is unsurprising that whiteness impacts America’s educational policies, including the creation of social studies standards (Hytten & Adkins, 2001; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Ward & Buchannan, 2021). As my study explored the maintenance of whiteness in the AHS, this literature provides a contextual background for other manifestations of whiteness and racial inequities in America’s educational policies.

Whiteness and Racism in Education Policy

Studies have found that racial inequities permeate many aspects of education in the US. In her seminal work, “Just What is Critical Race Theory and What’s It Doing in a Nice Field like Education?” Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that educational institutions uphold whiteness by using assessments as intelligence testing. These tests perpetuate racial stereotypes and allow

whites to feel relatively superior, while rationalizing knowledge (Hyttten & Adkins, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

An overwhelming majority of teachers in the United States are white (Hyttten & Adkins, 2001; Picower, 2009). While most of the teachers have positive intentions, one prevalent trend in the literature is that most teachers will continue to use practices that allow them to protect whiteness (Hyttten & Adkins, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Picower, 2009). Picower (2009) describes how teachers used three types of tools of whiteness: emotional, ideological, and performative. Teachers use emotional tools when they evoke their feelings to minimize racial issues, such as resisting guilt and responsibility. Examples of ideological tools include teachers emphasizing a narrative of progress and the personal nature of racism. Teachers demonstrated the performative tools when they behaved in ways consistent with whiteness, such as maintaining silence and espousing saviors (Picower, 2009). Additionally, instruction can maintain whiteness as teachers continue to seek pedagogies that control their "at-risk (read: Black)" students (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Whiteness and Racism in Social Studies Standards

In the realm of educational standards, the pervasive influence of whiteness is undeniable, representing a prevailing ideology and system of power (McClure, 2021). Utt (2018) found that World History standards in both California and Texas continued to privilege white identities and experiences. While the problem of whiteness in standards exists throughout social studies courses, I will focus on studies examining American history and civic standards, as that is the focus of my studies. Several studies have explored the recent efforts to incorporate examples from marginalized groups in American History Standards across states. A recurring theme is that the inclusion of marginalized groups often remains superficial, positioning these groups in

auxiliary roles, thereby reinforcing the dominance of whiteness (Anderson & Metzger, 2011; Conner, 2021; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Coined by Vasquez Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012), the term "the illusion of inclusion" aptly captures the nuanced ways in which race, culture, and difference are "both centralized and obscured in very nuanced ways" within these standards (pg. 421). Below I detail how previous literature has found whiteness manifesting in the standards through abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021).

Abstract Liberalism

Abstract liberalism perpetuates racism by using political liberalism, such as "equal opportunity," and economic liberalism, such as "individualism," to decontextualize and account for racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Abstract liberalism and individualism focus on individual choices instead of oppressive systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021). Individualism manifests in the standards by valuing property rights over human rights (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012).

This individualism frequently appears in the standards by perpetuating myths about capitalism, such as asserting that the US capitalist system is a meritocracy or ignoring the oppression that created racial disparities in wealth (McClure, 2021). When standards use words such as "individual" and "capitalism" more frequently than names of BIPOC and other minoritized groups, standards demonstrate valuing whiteness and property rights over human rights (McClure, 2021).

Another way abstract liberalism manifests in the standards is through emphasizing the roles of individuals in perpetuating racism instead of the role of institutional structures. In their study, Vasquez Heilig et al. (2012) found that the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

emphasized the role of Southern Governors, like George Wallace, in “maintaining the status quo” (p. 416). This language, in addition to obscuring racism by only alluding to it and failing to recognize the role of the perpetrators’ white racial identity, confines racism to individual actions instead of state-sanctioned violence (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Naturalization

Naturalization occurs when society portrays racial oppression as natural (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021). Naturalization can intersect with CRT and appear in standards by erasing meaningful actions of diverse figures and removing connections between white colonization and present-day issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012).

Erasing the contributions of diverse figures can occur when standards do not explicitly mention race or distance the role of race in a figure’s work (Busey & Walker, 2017; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012; Ward & Buchanan, 2021). Scholars have found that standards fail to mention the blackness of anti-lynching activist Ida Bells or erase the less positive racial experiences of Asian Americans, creating a false racial dichotomy. People of Color are either white or “other,” and meaningful diverse representation is missing from the standards (McClure, 2021; Vasquez Hsieh & Kim, 2020).

Another way that standards erase racism, creating naturalization, is by obscuring the role of race in slavery and ignoring the ideological underpinnings of slavery. Standards tend to portray slavery in an overly simple way, emphasizing it as an economic system. This portrayal allows instruction on slavery to occur without ever having to name the role of racist perpetrators in the system (Anderson & Metzger, 2011; Busey & Walker, 2017; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Slavery devoid of race promotes the idea of naturalization and maintains whiteness by

concealing the role of race in creating current-day class and race issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012).

Cultural Racism

Cultural racism occurs when social studies standards portray minoritized groups as having a monolithic experience and remove information on diverse cultures (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012).

Standards frequently portray Indigenous peoples as sharing a collective identity instead of recognizing variations in nations, bands, and tribes (Conner, 2021; Journell, 2009a; Sabzalian, 2021). Additionally, a study by Journell (2009a) found that in nine states, no standards mentioned Indigenous Americans in relation to the American Revolution and only one of the nine states mentioned their societal and military contributions. This finding illustrates the same pattern as other studies, which is that cultural racism occurs in standards through the erasure of their contributions (Ladson-Billings, 2003; McClure, 2021). Sabzalian et al.'s (2021) study additionally found that standards further erase Indigenous Americans by failing to mention their nationhood and referring to them as "groups" instead of "nations." This portrayal obscures Indigenous sovereignty and their civic identity (Sabzalian et al., 2021).

Like Journell's 2009 study on Indigenous American in standards, Vasquez Heilig et al.'s 2012 study also revealed that Texas standards perpetuate cultural racism with the erasure of Asian Americans and Indigenous Americans. This study found that the Texas Essential Skills and Knowledge for US history mentioned individuals or groups 165 times, and 55 times of those times mentioned people or groups of color. Yet, none of the mentions included Indigenous Americans and only three included Asian Americans (Vasquez Heilig, 2012).

An's (2016) study found that standards frequently lump Asian Americans together without attention to important differences, for example, the differences between a Pacific Islander experience and a Desi American experience. This cultural racism obscures the differences in class, language, migration history, and religion in the 50 ethnic groups that comprise the Asian American population (An, 2016). Additionally, when standards do mention specific Asian groups, they tend to focus on Chinese Immigration and Japanese Incarceration, perpetuating cultural racism through the erasure of contributions of other Asian American groups (An, 2016; Hsieh & Kim, 2020).

Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that US History often portrays America as a nation of immigrants that came together to create a homogenized "we." This portrayal of immigrants incorrectly aligns immigrants with the forced migration of enslaved people and erases pre-colonial Indigenous culture. Additionally, this unified narrative about American immigration removes the cultural differences of various immigrant groups (Conner, 2021; Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2009b).

The homogenization of BIPOC groups maintains whiteness by making diverse cultures seem irrelevant and expendable (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012). Students who see their culture erased in the social studies standards receive a message that their non-white culture is not valued (Conner, 2021; Journell, 2009b).

Minimization of Race

Minimization of race occurs by framing racial violence as happening individually and emphasizing a narrative of historical progress (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012). One way that this minimization occurs is by standards using language like "including" or "such as." When standards use this language, they frame instances

of racism or racial violence as an example of an exception instead of part of the larger historical narrative (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012; Ward & Buchanan, 2021). Ward and Buchanan (2021) found that the 2010 NC American History Standards positioned the 1898 Wilmington Coup as an optional example for two standards about conflict and compromises since Reconstruction. Both standards were devoid of the word racism. Standards framing the Wilmington Coup as optional content illustrate the minimization of race. This standard contributes to a larger historical narrative about how US history is one of linear progress and racial violence (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021; Ward & Buchanan, 2021).

The Intersection of Whiteness Frames

While I presented examples of each of the whiteness frames in this literature review, they do not act and appear individually in standards. For instance, as discussed above, several studies have emphasized that standards tend to portray Indigenous Americans and immigrants as monolithic groups (Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2009a; 2009b; Sabzalian, 2021). They also frequently portray these groups as only existing in the past, with state standards typically focusing on Indigenous Americans until the forced removal in the 1830s and immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. These portrayals not only erase diversity in the standards but present these groups as historical. With the historical presentation, standards do not require teachers to acknowledge present-day issues, such as poverty on reservations or contemporary Latin American migration (Conner, 2021; Hilburn et al., 2016; Journell, 2009b). Minoritized groups' homogenous and historical presentation maintains whiteness through cultural racism and naturalization (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012). My study adds to this body of literature on whiteness in social

studies standards by examining the various drafts of the AHS through McClure's (2021) framework.

Conclusion

In reviewing the literature, one can conclude that creating history standards, even if done in the name of efficiency and neutrality, is a political act (Apple, 2019; Bernstein, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). The rhetoric about the purpose of social studies courses and history standards on a national level, as well as the contentious state-level standards adoption processes illustrates the politicized nature of social studies standards (Kaplan & Owings, 2021; Placier et al., 2002).

Scholars argue that whiteness is fully part of the US's democratic society (Glaude, 2016; Hytten & Stemhagen, 2021). As whiteness functions as a dominant ideology, it influences many aspects of the education system, including standards (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Studies have found that whether the standards are strongly or weakly framed, the standards can reinforce white supremacy by diminishing the roles of POC, framing racism as an individual phenomenon, evading terms like "race" and "racism", and distorting racial progress (An, 2016; Conner, 2021; Hillburn et al., 2016; McClure, 2021).

CHAPTER III: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Educational standards are an important part of our nation's school systems as they determine what, and sometimes how, information that society deems as valuable makes its way into our classrooms (Apple, 2019; Grant, 2006; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). Further, it is policymakers and their policies that create the frameworks for school districts and teachers to implement the appropriate standards (Au, 2007; 2009; 2011; Grant; 2006; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). As such, I conduct a critical policy analysis to examine my research question, which is “How do policy windows shape the way educational policy actors maintain or disrupt whiteness during a standards adoption process?”.

In my study, I use qualitative methods as part of a critical policy analysis. Previous critical policy studies that seek to answer “how” questions use qualitative methods, as well as previous curriculum studies analyzing whiteness in social studies standards (Carpenter, 2017; Journell, 2008; 2009a; Lewis-Durham, 2020). Curriculum scholars recognize that meaningful inclusion in social studies standards is more than just the number of times the standards mention a diverse group. The context of the standards determines the meaningfulness of their inclusion (Journell, 2008; 2009a; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). An example of this is when people of color are only mentioned in standards in the context of oppression or gaining liberation, they are still erased from other aspects of US history leading to a lack meaningful inclusion in the standards (Journell, 2008). In addition to following previous research, this need for contextualizing standards necessitates qualitative methods.

Critical Policy Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

I ground this study in critical policy analysis (CPA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Both CPA and CDA are methods by which researchers can interpret ideas and determine

their meaning (Fairclough, 2010; Mansfield & Thachick, 2016; Mills & Birks, 2014; Young & Reynolds, 2017). CDA is the relational study of discourse and understanding its impact on social constructs and power (Fairclough, 2010). CDA is appropriate for this study as I seek to understand how the AHS's language is both a reaction to power distribution and how the AHS distributes power.

Researchers who use CPA are particularly interested in how power is implicitly and explicitly distributed in educational policy (Diem et al., 2018; Lewis-Durham, 2020). While not a homogenous movement, CPA adherents tend to explore the difference between policy rhetoric and reality, the development of a policy, and a policy's influence on power (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Reynolds, 2017). By examining the AHS's language and the language around its implementation, I seek to answer these questions that are traditionally included in CPA.

Both CDA and CPA involve the study of discourse and policies. However, there are differences between the two. CDA is a method for understanding how policies can engage in problematic discourses to reproduce inequities (Stanton, 2019). CPA is a method for analyzing the creation, implementation, and impact of a policy. As I seek to explore how a policy is created, specifically using discourse and rhetoric, both CPA and CDA are appropriate for this study.

Multiple Streams Framework

In this CDA and CPA study, I take a critical perspective on Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams framework, as done by other CPA scholars such as Diem, Sampson, and Browning (2018), Lewis-Durham (2020), and Horsford, Scott, and Anderson (2019). The multiple streams framework suggests that the agenda-setting and policy formation process happens through the convergence of problems, politics, and policies (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). This

convergence constitutes a window for policy production (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011). In this study, I argue that the racial reckoning during the summer of 2020 presented a policy window to push for more inclusive standards. This window was closed by conservative pushback and the creation of a political spectacle (Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011).

Problem Streams

Problems differ from conditions (Edelman, 1988; Kingdon, 2011). Kingdon (2011) argues that “We put up with all manner of conditions every day: bad weather, unavoidable and untreatable illness, pestilence, poverty, fanaticism... Conditions become defined as problems when we come to believe that we should do something about them” (p. 109). In my study, the conditions that existed were systemic racism and the lack of meaningful inclusion of marginalized experiences in social studies standards. Kingdon (2011) defines the problems stream as conditions that gain a place on the policy agenda.

Problems become policymakers' concerns through feedback, major events, and the change in indicators (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). Feedback can inform policymakers of problems through formal and informal means. Informally, policymakers receive complaints from constituents that create an awareness of problems. More formally, they learn about problems through formal program evaluation and systematic monitoring (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). Policymakers understand conditions as problems when a focusing event, such a disaster or crisis, highlights the issue (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). The media and policy entrepreneurs can increase the visibility of the focusing events, bringing more attention to the problem (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). Finally, a change in indicators, such as graduation rates or kindergarten readiness, can also elevate a condition to a problem (Kingdon,

2011; Rippner, 2016). This relates to my study as the 2020 summer of racial reckoning served as a focusing event, creating a change in the problems stream.

An elevated condition does not always become a problem and does not remain a problem indefinitely. People will interpret these conditions based on values, which guide what is elevated to a problem (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). A defined problem does not remain in a policymaker's attention indefinitely. Addressing the problem, attempting to address the problem, or more pressing problems arising shift focus and resources and return the problem to a condition (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). For my study this means that the adoption of the AHS does not solve or end the problem, even as attention has turned away from this condition.

Political Stream

When defining the political stream, Kingdon (2011) uses “political” to mean “electoral or partisan” (p. 145). The political stream revolves around changes in leadership and national mood, or climate in the country, public opinion, or social movements (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). Kingdon (2011) argues,

Common to all of these labels is the notion that a rather large number of people out in the country are thinking along certain common lines, that this national mood changes from one time to another in discernible ways, and that these changes in mood or climate have important impacts on policy agendas and policy outcomes. (p. 146)

The national mood is something that policymakers sense from interest groups and opinion polls (Diem et al., 2018; Fore, 1998; Kingdon, 2011;). This national mood might not reflect the mass public. Instead, the national mood might reflect the concentrated effort, organization, and leadership of a social organization, which a small active group may lead. Yet policymakers pay

attention to this group and their influence on mood with the hopes of electoral gains (Kingdon, 2011).

Leadership changes recognize both the change in administration, such as new governors, and a partisan shift in a governing body (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). New regimes set new agenda items and deprioritize previous problems (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). A policy proposal may be brought to a school board repeatedly, but the proposal might only gain traction when new policymakers sit on the board (Diem et al., 2018).

Policy Solutions Stream

While policy streams refer specifically to the problems presented to policymakers, policy solutions stream refers to existing policy ideas, which have yet to be enacted (Kingdon, 2011). The policy solutions stream is a “primeval soup of ideas” (Kingdon, 2011, p. 116). Policy specialists, such as researchers, policy staffers, and interest group advocates, have their ideas, which they turn into policy proposals and alternatives (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). Policy communities spend time introducing the public and policy communities to the ideas in their proposal and re-combining their ideas with already-familiar ideas (Kingdon, 2011). Not all policy proposals are selected to use as policy solutions; the criteria of feasibility, values, and implementation constraints heavily influence which reach policymakers’ agendas (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016). With the policy stream producing a short list of proposals, having an alternative proposal ready can increase the chance of a policy reaching an agenda (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). This was important for my study because the move towards inclusive standards happened prior to the focusing event, demonstrating that a policy alternative to traditional standards already existed in the policy stream.

Multiple Streams and CPA

The multiple streams process is compatible with critical policy analysis (CPA) because it recognizes that the policy process is nonlinear (Diem et al., 2018; Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011; Lewis-Durham, 2020; Rippner, 2016). The multiple streams framework originated from the garbage can theory, which asserts that solutions exist before problems arise and the linking of the two happens by chance (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011; Lewis-Durham, 2020; Rippner, 2016). The multiple streams theory also understands that while some policy changes and potential windows are predictable, such as the renewal of legislation or an election, most windows are unpredictable (Kingdon, 2011; Rippner, 2016).

Critics argue that the multiple streams theory creates too much of a rational conception of the independence of the three streams. Instead, they argue that the streams are interdependent, and that more attention needs to be paid to the sociopolitical context (Diem et al., 2018). However, CPA scholars have used the multiple streams frameworks in existing these studies (Diem et al., 2018; Horsford et al., 2019; Lewis-Durham, 2020). These scholars argue that understanding the confluence of the three streams and the sociopolitical context provides an understanding of agenda setting (Diem et al., 2018). Additionally, understanding the definition of problems and selecting solutions in the agenda-setting process is a study on discourse and power (Fore, 1998; Horsford et al., 2019; Lewis-Durham, 2020; Placier et al., 2002).

Political Spectacle

As in the multiple streams framework, an integral part of the policy process is the problem definition (Edelman, 1988; Kingdon, 2011; Horsford et al., 2019). Edelman's (1988) idea of the political spectacle is one way to understand how conditions become defined as problems. Edelman (1988) writes that,

The spectacle constituted by news reporting continuously constructs and reconstructs social problems, crises, enemies, and leaders and so creates a succession of threats and reassurances. These constructed problems and personalities furnish the content of political journalism and the data for historical and analytic political studies. They also play a central role in winning support and opposition for political causes and policies (p. 1).

Key elements of the political spectacle include: (1) understanding the importance of discourse, (2) defining events as a crisis, (3) using a discourse of rational policy analysis, (4) naming enemies and displacing targets, (5) the public as political spectators with limited participation outside of voting and polling, (6) the media is the mediator of the spectacle (Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019).

Another way of understanding the political spectacle is understanding politics as a performative construction of reality (Anderson, 2007; Carpenter, 2017; Koyama & Kania, 2014). The audience, or general populace, has access to a stylized version of the policies, which are performed on-stage by the policy actors (Koyama & Kania, 2014). Off-stage discussions are where real value allocation and the creation of dominant discourses occur (Carpenter, 2017; Koyama & Kania, 2014). In my study, there are multiple policy actors like the NCSBE, State Superintendent Catherine Truitt, Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson, and former President Trump. Each of these policy actors presented intentionally chosen rhetoric to influence the public's opinion of their policies.

The notion of a political spectacle reinforces the idea that policy is not a rational and democratic process but instead is influenced by power, discourse, and context (Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019; Lewis-Durham, 2020; Placier et al., 2002). This notion of

policy aligns with CPA. Several critical education policy analysts have used the idea of a political spectacle to study policies such as the discourse of transparency in No Child Left Behind, districts' use of the phrase “All Lives Matter,” and the shaping of the Title 1 School Improvement Grant during the Obama administration (Carpenter, 2017; Koyama & Kania, 2014; Lewis-Durham, 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical Whiteness Studies, originating from the works of W.E.B. Dubois and James Baldwin, focus on how whiteness acts as a system of power and privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Diem & Welton, 2021; Matias, 2022). While there are other ways of studying power and oppression, whiteness works as a “symbolically efficient way to name a constellation of social forces and cultural practices that systematically impose and reinforce the dominant cultures in our institutions" (Hyttén & Adkins, 2001, p. 435). As a system, whiteness is part of our everyday society, often in covert ways, and it affords particular people with privilege and power while excluding others (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Hyttén & Adkins, 2001; Utt, 2018).

An essential element of a dominant ideology, like whiteness, is the creation of frameworks or paths the ideology creates for interpreting information (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Whiteness uses the four frameworks of (1) abstract liberalism, (2) naturalization, (3) cultural racism, and (4) minimization of race to rationalize racism and discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021). The abstract liberalism frame uses political and economic liberalism with a decontextualized approach to explaining racial disparities. Examples of this frame include wanting “equal opportunity” while avoiding “preferential treatment,” claiming people are

“individuals” with “choices,” and believing in limited involvement of the government (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Using this language ignores the hundreds of years of state-sanctioned discrimination and violence that created inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The frame of naturalization justifies racial phenomena, such as segregation, as “just the way things are.” This framework presents racial preferences as being non-racist because they are simply biologically driven and out of someone’s control rather than recognizing race as a social construction (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The cultural racism frame rationalizes racial disparities by pointing to cultural differences while relying heavily on stereotypes and a sense of entitlement (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). These tropes include alleging that minoritized groups are lazy, that they do not value work or education, and that they are having too many kids (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The final frame, the minimization of race, believes that while racial disparities still exist and discrimination is no longer a central factor in anyone’s life because society has progressed (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2003). With the minimization of race, white people can accept that acts of racial violence and discrimination do occur, but they believe most racial or racist instances occur only in overt and individual forms (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Adkins, 2001). These frameworks are essential for informing McClure’s (2021) standards analysis matrix used to analyze the AHS as previously mentioned.

In this CPA, two of the key policy actors who worked against including “systemic” racism in the AHS are people of color. Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson, a Black man, and NCSBE Member Olivia Oxendine, a Lumbee woman, both heavily used rhetoric that seemed to uphold whiteness. I recognize that people of color cannot be racist because they do not have the same access to institutional power and privilege as white people. However, people of color can

have systems of beliefs that ultimately uphold white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018). Legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) writes that:

becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspect of one's life rather than being the object of other's domination (p. 1713).

While this quote follows Harris's story of her Black grandmother passing as a white woman in an environment where being white is understood not just as a racial identity but as an access point for power and privilege. In essence, whiteness can be understood as an ideology that can be embodied by anyone.

Furthering this conception of whiteness, other scholars have described whiteness as a performance. Gillborn (2005) writes that:

describing whiteness as a performance can operate as a shorthand means of drawing attention to the importance of actions and constructed identities- rejecting the simplistic assumption that 'whiteness' and 'white people' are one and the same thing... However, one of the problems with such an analysis is the degree to which the performers are aware of the performance they are giving. One of the most powerful and dangerous aspects of whiteness is that many...have no awareness of whiteness as a construction, let alone their own role in sustaining and playing out the inequities at the heart of whiteness (p. 489-490).

Conceptualizing of whiteness as a construction and performance, even if unknowingly, aligns with my conceptualization of a political spectacle as both emphasize how policy actors' actions impact public perceptions and policies (Edelman, 1988; Gillborn, 2005).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Whiteness Studies align with Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is an analytical lens that explains how institutional racism maintains the current system of oppression (Conner, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theorists assume that racism is a common part of society, works to serve the dominant group, and is a product of social thought (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Horsford et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This framework applies to this study because CRT is an appropriate lens for educational policy analysis, especially for understanding curriculum policy and standards (An, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; 2003; Sabzalian et al., 2021).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) outline five tenets of CRT: (1) racism is ordinary through color-evasiveness and liberalism; (2) interest convergence, when aligned with White interests, is what creates civil rights victories; (3) race is socially constructed; (4) the knowledge of people of color is legitimate; and (5) each race has experienced its own racialization and race intersects with other identities (An, 2016; Conner, 2021; McClure, 2021). These tenets are essential for informing McClure's (2021) standards analysis matrix, which I use to analyze the AHS. This matrix is included later as Table 3.2 and included as Appendix A.

Data Collection Methods

To begin this study, I collected all publicly available documents related to the AHS standards (Bhattacharya, 2017; Sampson, 2019). The five versions of the AHS are publicly available as PDFs on a DPI website about the standards revision process. I used these PDFs to code the different versions of the standards. The Unpacking Document is currently publicly available on the DPI website. The Unpacking Document specifically includes the standards, a description of what mastery of the standards means, suggested historical examples to teach the

standards, and suggested formative assessments. The Unpacking Document is intended to help districts and teachers create an appropriate curriculum based on the standards.

I started with the NCSBE meeting minutes to identify which meetings discussed the AHS. To identify where to start my meeting minutes search, I located the emails that I received from DPI while I was a North Carolina social studies educator on the standards adoption process. I received emails in April 2020, July 2020, November 2020, and February 2021. Starting with meeting minutes that I knew mentioned the AHS allowed me to understand the type of language the board used, referring to the changes as “social studies standards” as opposed to “social sciences” or “history” or the specific bill name. With this knowledge to understand and translate the meeting minutes, I then checked other NCSBE meeting minutes between December 2019-February 2021 for mention of the AHS. After collecting the meeting minutes, I located recordings of the meetings on YouTube. I used Trint, an AI transcription platform, to create transcripts of relevant meeting parts.

I coded six official documents from DPI, which included Draft One and Two the American History Standards, a Draft Three and Draft Four changes document, the adopted version of the American History Standards, the Unpacking Document, and the Preamble. I also coded 10 transcripts of NCSBE Meetings, which were on April 3, 2019, December 4, 2019; June 4, 2020, July 8, 2020; October 6, 2020; January 6, 2021; January 27, 2021; February 4, 2021; June 17, 2021; and July 8, 2021. I also searched for official statements from NC policymakers, including Governor Cooper, former Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest, Lieutenant Governor Robinson, former State Superintendent Johnson, and State Superintendent Truitt. Only Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson released a formal statement on the standards, which I

included in my document analysis. For a complete list of coded policy documents, refer to Appendix B.

I also gathered articles from the *Raleigh News & Observer*, the local newspaper of North Carolina's capital. I used this newspaper because the NCSBE meets in Raleigh and this newspaper provides the most thorough reporting on state government events. I found these articles through a keyword search using both the board members' names and social studies standards on the *Raleigh News & Observer* website. I also gathered articles from *EdNC*, an independent education news source, using the same keyword searches. I also tried looking through other North Carolina newspapers from other cities, rural and urban areas, and around the state including Charlotte, Salisbury, Alamance County, Fayetteville, and Winston-Salem. I chose these cities because they represented different demographics, and I am familiar with each of their newspapers. However, except for one article in *The Fayetteville Observer*, each search yielded only articles reproduced from the *Raleigh News & Observer*.

An essential part of document gathering is to remain open to adding more documents (Bhattacharya, 2017). After a general read through of the articles, I located referenced sources or other hyperlinked articles that I had not previously collected. The articles in the *Raleigh News & Observer* and *EdNC* mentioned a report from the Fordham Institute, articles from the *Carolina Journal*, and a cartoon from *WRAL*, a North Carolina television station that also features online content. I located the specifically mentioned documents and then conducted a search across the source's website for any other relevant articles and reports. For a complete set of coded articles, refer to Appendix B.

Finally, I looked for national articles about the NC AHS debate. I first used Google and searched for NC American History Standards and skipped past *EdNC*. I could not find articles on

several mainstream national reporting services, such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *CCN*. However, I did find articles about the AHS on *Fox News* and *The Washington Post*.

While I conducted my searches using Google and organizations' websites, if a paywall blocked the resource I wanted, I used the UNC-Greensboro Library database to locate the article. In total, I coded 54 media articles, with 18 of those articles coming from the *Raleigh News & Observer*, 12 coming from *WRAL*, and 10 coming from *EdNC*. The other 14 came from a range of other websites.

Since the debate in North Carolina about how to teach social studies and race is ongoing, I limited my search to articles prior to August 2021. The new standards were officially implemented in schools in Fall of 2021, which is my stop date. For a complete set of coded articles, refer to Appendix B.

Data Analysis Strategies

I first read through all the documents to gain a sense of the content. Then for my analysis, I completed three stages of coding. First, I began with the adopted version of the NC American History Standards, as well as Drafts One through Four and the Unpacking Document. During the first coding round, I used an inductive "exploratory" approach (Sampson, 2019). According to Sampson (2019) the exploratory approach includes familiarizing myself with the data and forming descriptions of the content. For my study, I read the standards to determine patterns, which I identified with codes. I then found similar codes to create categories. Once I had broad categories, I put these into conversation with the literature and theory related to whiteness to develop themes. This inductive approach follows the process described by Bhattacharya (2017)

and other critical standards analyses (Hilburn et al., 2017; Journell, 2009a; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). An example of this coding process can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Round One of Coding – From Quotes to Themes

Quotes	Code^b	Category	Theme
<p>“Griffith also said that standards need to have a better balance between equity and teaching substantive content” (Hui, 2021n)</p> <p>“Instead, Camnitz said Thursday that the new documents reflect the wording of a preamble adopted in February that talks about the ‘achievements’ and the ‘sins’ in the nation’s history” (Hui, 2021m)^a</p>	Balanced	Non-political (alongside other codes such as “more perfect union”, “neutrality”, “consensus”)	Framing the need for traditional standards in positive way

^aThis quote does not explicitly say the word balanced. However, I utilized this code to mean sharing both sides, as this quote advocates for.

^b While I am only demonstrating one code here to see how it connects to a category and then theme, quotes were frequently given multiple codes.

Additionally, during this first round of coding, I noted people or historical references that were specifically related to BIPOC individuals. For instance, I coded both “Barack Obama” and “The Great Migration” as Black and “Japanese American Internment” and “Emilio Aguinaldo” as Asian and Pacific Islander. I also used the code “immigrant” to note times the standards mentioned immigration and the code “marginalized” to note when the standards mentioned “racial minorities” or “oppression” as these references do not fit into one racial or ethnic category. Coding for BIPOC individuals provides a check that the standards do not create a problematic sheer absence of marginalized groups (An, 2016). Yet, simply mentioning a marginalized person or experience does not necessarily guarantee authentic inclusion in the standards, as those mentions could still be seen as auxiliary to the larger narrative (An, 2016;

Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). However, many studies that examine inclusivity of social studies standards use this counting as a first step to build the context of the standards (Conner et al., 2021; Hilburn et al., 2016; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

During the second coding round, I used a deductive structured-focused comparison analysis (Mills & Birks, 2014; Sampson, 2019). Specifically, I used the codes, categories, and themes that I crafted in round one of coding and compared structured ideas from Table 3.2 to further recognize patterns in the data (McClure, 2021; Mills & Birks, 2014). When analyzing social studies standards for whiteness and racist ideas, McClure (2021) created a matrix that represented the intersection of Delgado & Stefancic’s (2017) *Critical Race Theory*, Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, and Smith’s (2012) *Decolonising Methodologies*. I used the themes identified by McClure’s (2021) framework for analyzing the AHS. I felt this framework was appropriate to use as it drew heavily on my theoretical framework and had been previously used to analyze social studies standards (McClure, 2021). Table 3.2 provides a list of these themes.

Table 3.2 Matrix for Round Two of Coding from McClure, 2021, pg 23

Tenets of CRT	Individualism	Race Proof Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Race
Race is Ordinary	Whiteness is the universal race. ¹	Race is explained as abnormal. ³	White history provides guidelines to establish universal values, beliefs, and knowledge. ¹	Genocide, racism, and oppression are viewed as aberrations in our history rather than the norm. ¹
Interest Convergence	One group of individuals (i.e., slaveowners) are responsible for racial crimes rather than revealing the systematic racism and	Benevolent actions by white leaders towards diverse cultures benefit white society and	Whiteness is on full display and invisible at the same time. ²	The story of the founding of the white nation is told as raceless. ¹

	oppression of the entire economy, i.e. nation-building process. ²	whiteness history is patriarchal. ¹		
Race as Property	Property rights vs human rights. ²	Race has nothing to do with economic or class status. ²	Establishes 'Otherness' to promote white ideals. ¹	There are plenty of opportunities for people of color if they get out there and hustle for it. ³
Tenets of CRT	Individualism	Race Proof Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Race
Legitimacy of Knowledge of People of Color	White knowledge is individual, but BIPOC knowledge is collective. ¹	Missing in the content are meaningful representations of historical actions and interactions of diverse groups. ³	Lack of information about ethnically diverse people, issues, cultures, and experiences implies that they are not only irrelevant but expendable. ¹	Knowledge from people of color is minimized, and crudely represented and simplified. ¹
Place Race and Racism into Historical and Contemporary Contexts	Diverse cultures are often shown as the background props to the white narrative. ¹	No context between white colonization and current societal issues. ²	Actions of white people have nothing to do with race; creating blank spaces in the historical narrative. ²	Minimization of language to protect people of color. The linear development in white history also represents human progression from primitive to civilized. ¹

1. Adapted from Smith's (2012) *Decolonising Methodologies*
2. Adapted from Delgado and Stefancic (2017) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*
3. Adapted from Bonilla-Silva's (2018) *Racism without racism: Colour-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*.

The third coding round focused on how the standards and policymakers use counternarratives and racial literacy language. Racial literacy refers to practices that use a critical

lens for race talk to help students develop ways to talk about race and racism in society and their everyday life (Grayson, 2018; McClure, 2021). Critical race scholars consider counter-narratives as one of the key pillars of their analysis. Counternarratives refer to the lived experiences of marginalized communities and using these experiences to push back against mainstream narratives which frequently ignore these perspectives. Counternarratives allows the experiences of marginalized groups to serve as the basis for social change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Grayson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Drawing on other scholars, Grayson (2018) identifies twelve ways racial literacy and counter-narratives can manifest themselves in the classroom. These themes can be found in Table 3.3 and were used to code for racial literacy language in the AHS. Coding for racial literacy in the adoption process of the AHS and in the standards themselves was important to determine the presence of antiracist rhetoric.

Table 3.3 Matrix for Round Three of Coding: Characteristics and Behaviors of Racial Literacy

<i>Guinier 2004¹</i>	<i>Twine 2004²</i>	<i>Twine 2010³</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that race, racialism, and racism are contextual • Views of race on psychological, interpersonal, and structural levels • Consideration of race as it intersects with other demographic factors, including but not limited to ethnicity, socioeconomic class, geography, and gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of conceptual and discursive practices through which to interrogate race • Access to Black social networks • Exposure to Black produced media and symbols of historical and cultural Black struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of racism as a contemporary rather than historical problem • Consideration of the ways in which race and racism are influenced by other factors, such as class, gender, and sexuality • Understanding of the cultural value of Whiteness • Belief in the constructedness and socialization of racial identity • Development of language practices through which to

discuss race, racism, and
antiracism
• Ability to decode race and
racialism

Note: adopted from Grayson, 2018, pg. 6

1. Guinier, Lani. “From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma.” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004): 92– 118.
2. Twine, France Winddance. *A White Side of Black Britain: Interracial Intimacy and Racial Literacy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
3. Twine, France Winddance. “A White Side of Black Britain: The Concept of Racial Literacy.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 6 (2004): 878– 907.

Alongside coding the AHS text and official DPI standards documents, I coded meetings, press releases, newspaper articles, and other media sources. I would complete a round of coding the AHS and then complete the round for the media sources, so that these sources went through the same three rounds of coding as the standards. Evaluating this text is essential as a form of “concentrated looking” and contextualizing the creation of the policy, its development, and its intentions (Diem et al., 2014). This interrogation is an integral part of CPA, as practitioners of this research approach with the belief that the policy process is value-laden and messy (Diem et al., 2014; Horsford et al., 2019; Young & Reynolds, 2017).

Identifying the Actors

As part of my data analysis, I noted that five distinct groups played visible roles during the AHS adoption process. Labeling these groups helped provide a structure for understanding themes in the dialogue and ultimately rhetoric. Table 3.4 clarifies the position of each group and the name which I use for these groups throughout the study.

Table 3.4 Identifying the Actors

Groups I Refer to	Belief	Composed Of	Quoted or Referenced Examples Include
pro-Economic and Personal Finance policymakers/ lawmakers/ educators	The NC High School Social Studies Courses should be realigned to include the Economics and Personal Finance course	Educators and state policymakers	Governor Roy Cooper, Representative Kevin Corbin, Senator Jerry Tillman, Lt. Governor Dan Forest, Deputy State Superintendent David Stegall, 2019 Teacher of the Year Mariah Morris
anti-Economic and Personal Finance policymakers/ lawmakers/ educators	The NC High School Social Studies Courses should not be realigned to include the Economics and Personal Finance course	Educators who are members of Red4Ed, a NC teacher advocacy group and one NCSBE member	John DeVille, Leslie Meadows, Rodney Pierce
pro-inclusive American History Standards policymakers/ lawmakers/ educators	The AHS should reflect a racially and ethnically inclusive American history	NCSBE members registered with the Democratic party	Chair Eric Davis, Member James Ford, Member JB Buxton, 2019 Principal of the Year Matthew Bristow-Smith, 2018 Principal of the Year Tabari Wallace, 2020 Teacher of the Year Maureen Stover, Deputy State Superintendent David Stegall, Member Jill Camnitz
pro-traditional American History Standards policymakers/ lawmakers/ educators	The AHS should reflect an optimistic view of American history	NCSBE members registered with the Republican party	State Superintendent Mark Johnson ^a , Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson ^a , State Superintendent Catherine Truitt ^b , Member Amy White, Member Olivia Oxendine, Member Todd Chasteen
American History Standards Writing Committee	No publicly stated belief but appointed by the Department of Public Instruction to write the standards	Social Studies teachers and experts from around the state	List not publicly available

Note: While the pro-traditional AHS voices denied systemic racism, they never explicitly stated they were anti-inclusive standards. Their label comes from all of them being members of the Republican party, as well as wanting the standards to tell the traditional narrative of American history.

All the elected officials (Lt. Governor, State Superintendent) in the chart are Republican. All the appointed NC Board Members in the pro-inclusion group are Democrats. All the appointed NC Board Members in the pro-traditional group are Republicans. Educators (I.e., teachers, principals, etc.) mentioned in the table do not have political affiliations publicly available.

^a Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson replaced Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest because of the 2020 election.

^b State Superintendent Catherin Truitt replaced State Superintendent Mark Johnson because of the 2020 election.

Trustworthiness

The coding and interpretative process required many reads of the documents and standards. Through multiple reads, then coding and creating categories, I interrogated the data and my understanding of it. This interpretive process required reflexivity to ensure that I made my assumptions clear and the analysis process transparent (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2016; Young & Reynolds, 2017). I authored reflexivity journals to document my search for articles and documents, definitions of my codes, and my reflection on early themes and patterns to ensure stronger sense-making of the data. Through these reflexive journals, I was able to apply my own interpretations more consistently to the documents. Figure 3.1 is an example of one of my reflexivity journal entries. Later in the chapter, I include a positionality statement, which was my initial start to a reflexivity process.

Figure 3.1 Reflexivity Journal Entry

Coding Attempt - (9/12/22)

- **Partisan** - anything that mentioned a party or a politician
- **Controversial** - framing something as having opponents or causing controversy (closely related to partisan)
- **Equity** - framing something as intended to make the curriculum more just
- **Systemic** - racism/discrimination is systemic (closely related to equity)
- **Supporting documents/implementation** - framed as a hold-up for implementing standards and not the language of standards (examples of one of the controversies)
- Opposition language in Mark Robinson - **divisive/indoctrination/partisan**; he wants to promote "neutrality" (aka white-washed happy history)
 - **Noticing: News Article from General Assembly meeting focused more on delaying standards to increase time for supporting documents/preparedness (w/ undertones of being unhappy about the language); Robinson press release clear attack on language - difference in discourse**

Note: The color coding is my initial attempts at turning codes to categories and documenting connections I saw in the documents.

Another element of trustworthiness that I incorporated into my study is triangulation, or using data from multiple sources to ensure my biases did not significantly impact my findings and to confirm validity (Creswell, 2016). I use multiple data sources, including official DPI documents, meeting transcripts, and news articles from various sources. I further used triangulation to ensure validity by coding in three phases. This approach provided better understanding because in each round I viewed the information through a different lens (Creswell, 2016).

Finally, my journal and writing in the dissertation include significant descriptions of both the standards and their relationship to the coding. I include many direct quotes from the standards or discourse to fully illustrate the point I made and the original evidence I interpreted. These descriptions ensure trustworthiness by allowing readers to understand my process (Creswell, 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology employed in this study, which involved providing background on the Critical Policy Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks used in this study, as well as my theoretical frameworks of Critical Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory. I detailed the collection of documents and three phase coding process of the study. I also explained how I ensured trustworthiness in the study through reflexivity, thick descriptions, and triangulation. The chosen methodology was appropriate for addressing the research questions due to the qualitative nature of the study and previous similar studies. By employing these research techniques, I aimed to minimize biases and enhance the reliability of the findings. With a robust methodology in place, the focus of the next chapter now shifts to the analysis of the gathered data.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

As stated previously, the primary purpose of this research is to explore how discourse from the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and various stakeholders influenced the creation of the 2021 North Carolina High School American History Standards for Secondary Social Studies (AHS). I also aim to understand how political discourse and the AHS worked to maintain or disrupt whiteness. In reviewing the data, I answer the following three questions:

- How much did discourse in the NCSBE influence the AHS?
- How much did national-level policy discourse influence state-level policy discourse?
- How much did the state-level discourses and the AHS maintain or disrupt whiteness?

Key Terminology

As mentioned in my methods section, I identified five distinct groups. Policymakers that wanted to see the addition of the Economics and Personal Finance course (EPF) are labeled pro-EPF. Policymakers that opposed the addition of the EPF course are labeled anti-EPF. Policymakers that want the AHS to reflect a history inclusive of minoritized groups are labeled as pro-inclusive AHS. Policymakers that wanted an optimistic version of American history, are labeled pro-traditional AHS, as they support a more traditional narrative. The standards' writing committee was created by the Department of Public Instruction and was composed of teachers from across the state to write the standards. The standards writing committee did not actively participate in NCSBE meetings or provide interviews to the media.

As a reminder, in this study, I define discourse as semiotic practices that are context-dependent and shaped by institutional, cultural, and social practices. Discourse can include written text, spoken language, and visual images. As scholars have noted, discourse is context-dependent and shaped by institutional, cultural, and social practices (Horsford et al., 2019;

Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2011). Throughout the review of my findings, I use the word rhetoric. In this study, I use rhetoric to denote the strategic use of language to influence policy (Winton, 2013). While discourse refers to all documents and language used, regardless of ideology, rhetoric refers to intentional language to promote a particular ideology and inspire action (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Winton, 2013).

Finally, when discussing whiteness in the discourse, I conceptualize whiteness as the social, cultural, and institutional practices that grant privileges and supremacy to the dominant (White) group (Hyttén & Adkins, 2001; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Inclusion and inclusive standards actively try to displace this dominance. Inclusive standards incorporate the experiences of minoritized groups in ways central to the historical narrative that both recognizes experiences of oppression and liberation and celebrates cultural accomplishments (Journell, 2008; 2009a; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Overview

In this chapter, I share my research findings from coding NCSBE Meeting Dialogue, media coverage, and the standards. Significant findings emerged from the data, including:

- Four Rhetoric Phases in Relation to Policy Windows and Political Spectacles
- National Influence Through Diffusion, Policy Windows, and Agenda Setting
- Presence of Anti-Blackness, Dearth of Antiracism, and Possibilities of Racial Literacy
- Movement Towards Inclusive Language Prior to, During, and After a Policy Window
- Whiteness Through Individualism, Monolithic Groups, and Unitive Rhetoric

I begin by dividing the debate around the AHS into four different phrases, each with distinctly different rhetoric. These phrases provide insight into how national-level policies impact the NCSBE policies, as well as how the NCSBE used rhetoric to influence the AHS. After this, I

discuss how the summer of racial reckoning, Trump's 1776 Project, and a Fordham Institute report influenced NCSBE rhetoric. This section continues to help answer how national events influence NCSBE policy. In the third section, I focus on the actual language of the standards, specifically examining the extent that NCSBE rhetoric influenced the adopted version of the AHS. I examine how the AHS and NCSBE manifest whiteness, a direct response to my third research question. I conclude this chapter by analyzing how anti-Blackness, antiracism, and racial literacy present themselves in discourse and the AHS, again demonstrating the relationships between NCSBE language and the standards and providing a further understanding of how whiteness manifests in the standards.

Four Rhetoric Phases as Responses to Policy Windows and Political Spectacles

Through my discourse analysis, I identified four distinct rhetoric phases that spanned from the proposed realignment of social studies courses in April 2019 until the adoption of the American History Supporting Documents in July 2021. These phases illustrate the non-linear development of the AHS, exemplify the influence of multiple policy streams, and demonstrate how different policy windows emerged to frame the policy problem (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011). Understanding these rhetorical phases is crucial because they clarify the relationship between the NCSBE's discourse and the language of the AHS. Moreover, these phases shed light on my first research question concerning the impact of the NCSBE's discourse on the AHS. In addition, the analysis of these four rhetoric phases highlights the connection between national-level policy discourse and state-level rhetoric, which addresses my second research question.

The phases I identified are: Phase One – The Purpose of Teaching Social Studies, which involved debate over the inclusion of a personal finance course and the condensing of American

history courses; Phase Two - Representation Matters, which centered on pushing for additional inclusive standards; Phase Three – Explicit Language and Indoctrination, which involved critics of the AHS creating strong opposition to the terms “gender” and “inclusion” in the standards; and finally, Phase Four - Frame Stronger Standards, where the debate returned to strong versus weak framing of the standards. Table 4.1 outlines the phases, dates, corresponding state and national events, and quotes illustrating common sentiments during this phase.

Table 4.1 The Different Phases of Rhetoric

Phase	Dates	Corresponding Drafts and Documents	Corresponding Events	Quotes that Illustrate Common Sentiment During this Phase
One The Purpose of Social Studies	April 2019 - May 2020	Drafts One, Two, & Three	-NC General Assembly Realigns Social Studies Graduation Requirements -Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic	"I mean, I would love to talk about financial literacy, grounded in some macro-economics of racial wealth gaps and all that, but I know that's off the table...A lot of this feels very problematic to me ... This feels like an à la carte arrangement when it comes to history. As we think about creating global-ready citizens, it really frightens me."- James Ford, NCSBE Member (Hinchcliffe, 2019) "They want to know about credit and debit, taxes, what W-4 forms are, W-2, how to budget, how to get grants for college, what fraud is, 401Ks, interest levels, how to get a mortgage [and] how to do business forms." - Mariah Morris, Teacher of the Year (Hinchcliffe, 2019)
Two	May 2020 -	Drafts Three & Four	-America’s summer of racial reckoning in	"...even with the challenging aspects of history that must be

Representation Matters	December 2020		<p>response to the murder of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery</p> <p>-DPI decides to delay the implementation of Social Studies Standards and extend the process</p> <p>-President Trump’s establishment of the 1776 Commission</p> <p>-2020 Election of Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson and State Superintendent Catherine Truitt</p>	<p>taught, the voices of the minority and the oppressed must be heard in order for our North Carolina students to have a full and accurate understanding of events and what they mean to us today.” – Lori Carlin, DPI section chief of social studies and arts education (Hui, 2020b)</p> <p>“A lot of questions (are being asked), not just in our state but across our country about the degree to how we go about teaching our history and social studies, the perspectives that are included, the issues that are addressed.” - JB Buxton, NCSBE member (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b)</p>
Three Explicit Language and Indoctrination	January 2021 - February 2021	Drafts Four & Five (approved draft)	<p>-January 6th Insurrection at the Capitol</p> <p>-Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson and State Superintendent Catherine Truitt assume office</p> <p>-Fordham Institute releases the <i>State of Social Studies</i> report</p> <p>-NCSBE adopts the AHS</p>	<p>“We have to talk about the hard things, the failures, but we also have to build optimism and unity” - Todd Chasteen, NCSBE member (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b)</p> <p>“The proposed standards now have the specificity of language and breadth of scope that previous iterations were missing” -NCSBE educator advisors (Jackson et al., 2021)</p>
Four Stronger Standards	March 2021 - Ongoing	Draft Five & Supporting Documents	-NC General Assembly passes bill to prevent the teaching of Critical Race Theory; vetoed by Governor Cooper	“The standards document is just plagued with poorly worded gobbledegook that doesn’t mean anything” – David Griffith, Fordham report author (Hui, 2021m)

-NCSBE adopts the Unpacking Document

“The sooner that we can get these supporting documents to our teachers to give them sufficient time to be able to develop those really robust and rigorous lessons, the better” – Maureen Stover, NCSBE Teacher of the Year Adviser (Hui, 2021h)

Phase One: The Purpose of Teaching Social Studies

In 2019, the North Carolina General Assembly realigned the high school social studies curriculum, initiating Rhetoric Phase One. The General Assembly decided to situate the EPF course within the social studies department and mandated it as a requirement for students. Previously, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that high school students take four social studies courses, including World History, American History 1, American History 2, and Civics and Economics. The NCSBE condensed American History 1 and 2 to make room for the EPF course in their graduation requirements, which the North Carolina General Assembly legislates can only require four social studies courses (Hui, 2020a). My analysis revealed that at this point, two strands of rhetoric emerged. Pro-EPF lawmakers emphasized the importance of financial literacy from a utilitarian standpoint, while those in favor of keeping American History 1 and 2 argued for the importance of teaching history to develop critical thinking skills.

Phase One did not include a debate about the AHS, but an analysis of this phase provides insight into how NC policy actors view the purpose of history. Additionally, Phase One lays a foundation to demonstrate how the debate about AHS dramatically shifted during Phase Two. The discourse in Phase One is primarily from NC General Assembly members and educators, demonstrating the lack of power of the NCSBE during this phase; this void provides the beginning of an answer to the first research question on how much discourse in the NCSBE influenced the AHS. Finally, as it relates to my third research question on the AHS maintaining

whiteness, my analysis revealed that discourse on race and inclusion were largely absent from Phase One, exemplifying one way in which state-level discourse maintained whiteness.

Pro-EPF policymakers argued that the EPF course would fill gaps in students' knowledge. When asked about their reasoning for creating the course, NC General Assembly Members spoke about students' lack of financial literacy. For instance, Republican Rep. Kevin Corbin stated, "You have kids leaving high school that don't think anything about personal financial responsibility" (Hui, 2019a). Additionally, Republican Senator Jerry Tillman stated, "We want to make sure these kids know how money works, how banking works, how investing [works], how credit works, how money can be your friend or your enemy. They don't know this" (Hui, 2019a). Both lawmakers argue that students need to learn financial literacy, which is why the graduation requirements need to include the EPF course. Implicit in the argument is that because the EPF course is being labeled a social studies course, social studies have a utilitarian function to prepare students to be productive members of America's economy (Placier et al., 2014).

Anti-EPF advocates, mainly educators, believed the addition of EPF would reduce American History instruction. Anti-EPF advocates argued that this change would harm the development of students' critical thinking skills. John deVillie, a social studies teacher, explained he opposed the changes because:

I don't want to see American History 1 and American History 2 collapsed into a single class because all of the richness we have developed in those courses with primary source analysis and the critical thinking skills which are enhanced would be lost (Hui, 2019a, n.p.).

During this time, mainstream media coverage equally included discourse about the importance of including personal finance and the opposition to condensing history. This balanced media coverage during Phase One demonstrates that policymakers had not yet made the course realignment a political spectacle (Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019). Additionally, during this period, all but one media article quoted NC General Assembly policymakers but not NCSBE members; the absence of NCSBE members in the coverage illustrates the minimal impact of the NCSBE in choosing to realign the standards. During this phase, the NC General Assembly was the more influential political body.

Phase One rhetoric was largely race-neutral. This finding is unsurprising because, as a reminder, I believe that whiteness is the dominant ideology in society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). While in Phases Two and Three rhetoric predominantly focused on inclusion and the purpose of history, discourse on the purpose of history and inclusion was largely absent in Phase One, with two exceptions. During the December 2019 NCSBE meeting, the board discussed course sequencing extensively to ensure that students would meet the newly legislated social studies graduation requirements. Member James Ford stated:

I'm not averse to the idea of teaching something in a comprehensive manner and doing it well...But I'm concerned because the current structure that we have... puts us in a potential situation where we can create...a legacy of historical ignorance at a moment when we least need it nationally...I would love to talk about financial literacy grounded in some macroeconomics of racial wealth gaps and all that, but I know that's off the table. So, a lot of this feels very problematic to me, especially one who envisions education as the process of making one more civic-ready and more well-rounded and more global-centric...Assuming that this new American history course...is centered on multiple

perspectives, not just traditional white Protestant male perspectives, but it incorporates the legacy of African American and Native perspectives-great... I'm not certain that that's what's being offered, though (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2019b, n.p.).

Ford's comment serves as an attempt to bring in discourse on the inclusion of marginalized groups in social studies standards. Early in the process, he urges for inclusion in both EPF and AHS. Unlike anti-EPF advocates, he also believes that one American History course can be inclusive if done intentionally. In response to this comment, multiple board members redirected to the legislated graduation requirements and course sequencing discussion instead of addressing inclusivity (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2019b). The lack of attention to this comment illustrates how an inclusive standard policy proposal had already existed in the policy solutions stream but had not yet been attached to a problem (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011; Lewis-Durham, 2020; Rippner, 2016).

The following month, EdNC, a nonpartisan education news organization in North Carolina, released an opinion piece titled "Wrong Time in History to Cut Back on History" (Guillory, 2020). This article was EDNC's only publication on the AHS during Phase One, again demonstrating the absence of a political spectacle (Horsford et al., 2019). This piece emphasized the importance of history education for building a civic culture and democracy but did not mention the need for inclusion. The one-time the word "race" does appear in the article is when EdNC quotes Rodney Pierce, an educator. Pierce is describing his fear that condensing history "will allow some teachers to gloss over this history," referring to examples of historical systemic racism and discrimination when applying for loans (Guillory, 2020). This quote is the only mention of race during Phase One, which exemplifies how the NC General Assembly and

NCSBE created a “race-neutral” environment at the AHS’s inception, foregrounding whiteness as the dominant ideology (McClure, 2021).

Discourse about American Exceptionalism was also limited during Phase One. The one exception came from the *Carolina Journal*, a conservative publication. The *Carolina Journal* published a piece in December 2019 titled “Social Studies Standards: Striking a Balance Between Honesty, Optimism,” which argued for teaching an optimistic view of American history. This piece echoed DPI’s call for public feedback on Draft One of the AHS and criticized the 1763 starting point of the American History course. In this article, Dr. Terry Stoops writes that “European exploration and colonization ... would receive minimal attention in high school” (2019). Omitted from this statement is that indigenous civilization and culture would also receive minimal attention and erasure from high school. The article further stated that “the standards reflect an interpretation of American history that is imbued with cynicism about the American experiment” and argued on the importance of teaching American Exceptionalism and the American Dream (Stoops, 2019). While most discourse during Phase One focused on the debate about required courses, this article provides an early insight into the debate over whose history belongs in NC American History classes. The call to avoid “cynicism” and ensure the coverage of “European exploration” is a direct call to ensure the AHS reflects a White history (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; McClure, 2021). Additionally, this framing starts to build the rhetoric that standards must build optimism about American History.

Taken together, Ford’s comment, the EdNC article, and the John Locke article lay the foundation for rhetoric about inclusive standards for both pro-traditional and pro-inclusive AHS advocates. However, this type of discourse was not dominant in this phase, which is likely due to

the absence of a policy window and the presence of political spectacle further constructing whiteness (Edelman, 1988; Gillborn, 2005; Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011).

Phase Two: Representation Matters

When Draft Three came before the NCSBE for approval in June of 2020, America was amid a racial reckoning in the wake of the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery. The NCSBE called for more inclusive language in the standards when reviewing Draft Three (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a). At this point, rhetoric shifted from the importance of teaching history and personal finance to what inclusion looks like in a history class. This marked the beginning of a new phase that focused on representation.

One marked difference between Phases One and Two is that in Phase Two, the NCSBE became the prominent policy actor, as opposed to the NC General Assembly. While this is a function of delegated duties, the General Assembly creates graduation requirements, and the NCSBE writes standards. The shift in policymaker power reveals new insights into my first research question on the role of discourse from the NCSBE. Additionally, Phase Two provides an understanding of my second research question on the relationship between national-level policy discourse and state-level policy discourse because the policy window created by the summer of racial reckoning is one example of how national events influenced NC state-level politics.

During Phase Two, pro-inclusive AHS advocates created strong rhetoric about the necessity of creating inclusive standards, a possible step toward disrupting whiteness. Pro-traditional AHS advocates framed diversifying standards as the NCSBE created a curriculum and

the start of a race-neutral framework to protect whiteness began (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Matias, 2022).

The NCSBE met on June 3rd and 4th, 2020, less than two weeks after the murder of George Floyd. At this time, pro-inclusive AHS NCSBE members started to argue that they believed the AHS left too much room for teachers to omit discussions around race and inequities. During the June 4, 2020, NCSBE meeting, Member James E. Ford spoke of the lack of inclusion in the AHS:

I can't look at the standards and say to myself, where would I find Black Wall Street and Tulsa, Oklahoma? Where would I find events like the Stonewall Rebellion? ... It's just too vague, too ambiguous, at this point. It lacks too much precision for me to give (approval). It just doesn't feel as if it's ready for prime time. And so, I really, really want us to think about incorporating perspectives deliberately beyond kind of saying diversity... (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a, n.p.).

In this quote, Ford criticized the AHS for not being explicit enough, or being too weakly framed, to ensure that teachers will create an inclusive curriculum. However, in this phase, he stopped short of a holistic critique of the intent or tone of the AHS.

Board Member Tabari Wallace, 2018 Principal of the Year Advisor, followed Member Ford's Critique by saying:

If we don't understand our history, we're doomed to repeat it. And that's why I want to echo the sentiments of Mr. Ford... I do want to make sure that we understand the hypersensitivity of some of these objectives of history in regard to our students and parents. I wanted to make sure that their voices are heard and concerned in some of these matters (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a, n.p.).

In the context of Ford’s previous comments about the inclusion of Black history, the students, and parents that Wallace was referring to are implied to be students and parents of color. Wallace is asking that DPI ensures that the standards reflect the content desired by students and parents of color.

After about an hour of discussion on the standards with more comments like Wallace and Ford urging for inclusion, Member J.B. Buxton proposed to Chairman Eric Davis to delay the AHS. Buxton stated, “I think we also have some questions about who is going to be engaged and the multiple perspectives that will be engaged in that. So, my thought would be that we would move this as an action item to July, give the department some time to bring back some of those items they've committed to....” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a, n.p.).

When discussing inclusion, Buxton spoke of refining the language in the introductory paragraphs and creating the Unpacking Documents to better center perspectives of marginalized groups. He wanted to ensure that the refining process will include stakeholders of color.

Chairman Davis replied:

Additional months on this particular part of the issue in terms of these standards would be time well spent. And so, I think your approach is an appropriate one for us to consider when it comes time to vote on this item. And we will set it up separately so that this item is voted on independently (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a, n.p.).

In my analysis, this moment solidified a distinction between Phase One and Two and the presence of a policy window. Separating the EPF and AHS standards illustrated how the NCSBE does not simply approve mandates from the NC General Assembly, such as realigning high

school graduation requirements, but they also use meetings to intentionally influence the standards' content (Fore, 1998; Fogo, 2015; Noboa, 2011).

Analysis reveals that between June 2020 - Sept 2020, NCSBE members repeatedly spoke about wanting standards that were inclusive of different racial and ethnic groups and other minoritized groups. Similarly, the media's reporting favorably echoed those calls. After voting at the June meeting to move the discussion on NC Social Studies Standards to the July meeting, the NCSBE decided at the July 8th, 2020 meeting to give more time for the standards committee to rewrite the standards to ensure inclusion. During this July meeting, Member Matthew Bristow-Smith, 2019 Principal of the Year advisor, voiced his support for more inclusive standards by stating:

Our educators and our parents have spoken with a clarion call to me and to us, to our advisors, that they want our North Carolina public school children to learn a more robust and complex and diverse and representative, and in many ways, a more profound rendering of American history (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b, n.p.)

Bristow-Smith's comment directly speaks to the need for more inclusive standards that create an accurate depiction of American history (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2018; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). When Bristow-Smith claims that other educators and parents want inclusivity, this establishes his credibility; he is speaking from more than his personal preference but speaking to the popular demand for inclusion during the summer of 2020. The one overt objection to diversifying the standards during Phase Two came from Board Member Olivia Oxendine. Oxendine feared that by ensuring inclusion in the AHS, the AHS would quit being standards and would instead develop into a curriculum. The NCSBE and Department of Public Instruction's

role is to develop standards, and districts control the curriculum. During the July 8th Meeting, NCSBE Member Olivia Oxendine stated:

If we move in the direction of standards becoming quasi-standards and looking more like a list of grade-level things that consist of various topics...I will go ahead and call them topical standards, and they are no longer, that is not a standard...I am not opposed to revising our standards if it's going to close, close gaps, the old voids, and bring to our students a full body of history. I'm not opposed to that, but I am concerned about going down a pathway where we're going to be looking at our standards as the carrier of topics... (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b, n.p.)

At this point, NCSBE Member Oxendine seems to still support the call for inclusive standards or closing “gaps.” I argue that her comments also reflect the strength of the policy window and media framing that came along with the racial reckoning (Horsford et al., 2019).

Further, it should be noted that in her comments, Oxendine used a race-neutral approach to critique the inclusion of marginalized groups, which protects whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Matias, 2022). The race-neutral approach used by Oxendine makes contributions of people of color seem auxiliary to the role of American History, as Oxendine implies that the only way to ensure an inclusive narrative is by including specific topics. This approach to understanding American History as only including token references to people of color is one-way standards also reifies whiteness with the illusion of inclusion (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Phase Three: Explicit Language and Indoctrination

Phase Three was marked by a change in the political streams with the 2020 elections in North Carolina that resulted in a conservative Lieutenant Governor, Mark Robinson, and a conservative state superintendent, Catherine Truitt. Robinson and Truitt joined the NCSBE in

January 2020, the same month the NCSBE reviewed Draft Four of the AHS. My analysis revealed that rhetoric on behalf of pro-traditional AHS about the divisive nature of the standards resulted in a direct change, albeit limited change, to the wording of the AHS. This phase constituted a political spectacle as media coverage intensified and NCSBE members disparaged inclusive standards (Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019). Additionally, the attack by pro-traditional AHS NCSBE members on having inclusive standards demonstrates one way that whiteness was present during the AHS discourse.

During this phase, people began openly disparaging the request for the AHS to focus on a more inclusive narrative. Many people voiced concerns that these standards created an overly negative tone. Analysis revealed that “tone” expressly referred to the authentic inclusion of historical instances of systemic discrimination. During the January 27th, 2021 NCSBE Meeting, Lieutenant Governor Robinson stated, "...first issue that I have with these standards is the overall tone. I don't like the tone of these standards, what's written in them" (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b, n.p.)

During the same meeting, NCSBE Member Oxendine also opposed inclusive topical standards and expressed concern over the tone of the AHS. Oxendine stated:

It is a tone that I'm receiving when I look at the standards in entirety, especially more specifically in the upper grades. If we could amend the tone, and you can't amend the tone unless you amend the standards and the objective, that would please me enormously (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b, n.p.).

From January 2021 - February 2021, repeated specific critiques about the tone were accompanied by comments that the AHS was “leftist,” “overly negative,” and “divisive” by Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson and other pro-traditional NCSBE members in NCSBE

meetings, as well as to the media (Office of Lieutenant Governor, 2021; NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b). The use of this rhetoric created a political spectacle as it manufactured a crisis about indoctrination occurring in schools (Edelman 1988; Horsford et al., 2019).

In addition to the perception that the AHS created negative feelings, rhetoric also focus on three specific terms “systemic racism,” gender identity,” and “systemic discrimination.” State Superintendent Catherine Truitt specifically explained her issues with these terms during the January 27th NCSBE Meeting:

One reason it's important to expand the definitions of those three terms... is because the extent to which discrimination in our country remains institutionalized...is a subjective answer. One [answer] that historians are not in agreement about... We do on paper have a legal system that generally protects the rights and liberties of the vast majority of people in our country... most of the time. And so, while racism absolutely is real and needs to be included in our standards, the definition of racism must be expanded, as [do] the definition of identity and discrimination, to reflect the complexity of this term ... [The definitions] need to allow the flexibility for teachers to choose which type of racism, which type of discrimination, and which type of identity is most appropriate for the objective being addressed (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b).

Like Oxendine’s critiques during Phase Two, which focused on framing the standards, Superintendent Truitt’s remarks never explicitly asked for less inclusive standards. In fact, in her comment, Truitt recognizes that racism is real and that the AHS should include racism. However, Truitt’s response questions the existence of “systemic” racism, framing her opposition as

wanting to provide flexibility to teachers. By questioning the existence of systemic racism, Truitt also upheld whiteness by making racism seem like an anomaly instead of being deeply embedded in American history (McClure, 2021).

While there was fierce opposition to the tone of the AHS from pro-traditional AHS policymakers, pro-inclusive AHS NCSBE members were also vocal about their support. Pro-inclusive AHS advocates consistently used the same rhetoric that began in Phase Two as they emphasized the importance of inclusive representation in standards. Maureen Stover, Teacher of the Year and NCSBE member, explained:

I think that's why it was critically important that...the language that was included in those standards was intentionally placed there in order to help guide teachers and...to give them the framework...to develop those curriculums that enable them to have those hard conversations with their students and to be able to teach their students from multiple viewpoints and perspectives (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b).

Stover's comments indicate that she prefers strongly framed standards to ensure that teachers create inclusive curriculum. Her comments align with previous research that argues weak framing may create opportunities for teachers to apply their sensemaking to standards if there are no clear expectations (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Additionally, her emphasis on the importance of hard conversations demonstrates Stover's desire to see standards that enable racial literacy and displace whiteness (Grayson, 2018).

While comments like Stover's were common during Phase Three, they mirrored rhetoric from Phase Two. However, my analysis revealed that the policy window created by the racial reckoning was closing since these conversations occurred six months after. Instead, pro-

traditional AHS advocates used the closing window to shift the narrative as they manufactured a political spectacle and attempted to create a new policy window (Horsford et al., 2019).

During Phase Three, the Department of Public Instruction approved the AHS without the word “systemic,” despite dissatisfaction from both pro-traditional AHS voices and pro-inclusive AHS advocates, as neither side felt the AHS went far enough. The NCSBE also voted to approve the standards 7-5, split along party lines, with Democrats voting in favor of the AHS (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021d). This draft, which was Draft Five of the AHS, kept most changes from Draft Three to Draft Four that mentioned race but removed the term “systemic” from the standards (“gender” did not appear in the AHS, but it did in other social studies courses’ standards the NCSBE approved alongside the AHS). This removal of the word “systemic” occurred as a direct result of the opposition to language in Draft Four. Pro-traditional HS policymakers felt that the changes did not go far enough to alter the “negative” tone of the AHS. Even after the NCSBE approved the standards, pro-traditional AHS policymakers continued to frame “the left” as the enemy and remained connected to the “objective” research of think tanks. This was performative because of how policymakers used a dominant discourse to construct pro-inclusive policymakers as villains and aligned with Carpenter's (2017), Edelman's (1988), and Horsford et al.'s (2019) notions of political spectacle, as well as Gillborn's (2005) conception of whiteness as a performative construction.

Phase Four: Frame Stronger Stanadards

Phase Four began after the NCSBE approved the AHS in February 2021. The approval did not end the debate around the AHS, as the Department of Public Instruction needed to create the supporting documents for the standards, and the NCSBE needed to approve these documents.

During this time, rhetoric shifted from the content of the standards and began to focus on the framing of the standards.

In June 2021, right at the time the NCSBE adopted the Unpacking Document, the Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank, published a review of the State of Social Studies Standards. In this review, the Fordham Institute rated the new NC Social Studies Standards an “F.” The Fordham Institute explains the “F” rating by stating:

The high school standards for American History are conceptual, failing to reference non-negotiable historical content. There is a reference to “domestic conflicts” but no mention of the Civil War. There is a reference to “international conflicts” but no mention of World War I or World War II. There is a reference to “foreign policy” but no mention of the Cold War or Vietnam. Students are expected to “differentiate the experience of war on groups and individuals in terms of contribution, sacrifice, and opposition” (AH.H.1.3). They are also to “critique the extent to which economic, social, cultural, geographic, and political factors of various turning points changed the American historical narrative” (AH.H.3.3). But studying the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement would probably be simpler (Stern et al., 2021, p. 249).

The comment from the Fordham Institute report does not attack the controversial nature of the AHS for their attempts to be inclusive or the “negative tone.” The Fordham Institute emphasizes that the standards should require the teaching of the Civil Rights Movement. This topic would be tough to teach accurately without including marginalized perspectives and covering racism. However, the Fordham Institute report critiqued the AHS for its “conceptual nature,” lack of required topics, or weak framing (Stern et al., 2021). While the Fordham Institute presents the weak framing of the standards as inherently problematic, academics

acknowledge that both weak and strong frames have limitations (Journell, 2008; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Additionally, the Fordham Institute's focus on students receiving content knowledge, even when it is inclusive content, upholds whiteness as this view emphasizes schools depositing knowledge into students instead of developing inquisitive and critical scholars (Freire, 1972).

The “neutral” academic language from the Fordham Institute provides a means for pro-traditional AHS lawmakers to engage in political spectacle and started Phase Four (Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019). When the NCSBE discussed adopting the supporting documents, pro-traditional AHS members adopted similar rhetoric to the Fordham Institute. For instance, State Superintendent Catherine Truitt, in an interview with Carolina Journal, stated, “Our standards are so overbroad, so vague, and so absent of chronology as a historical concept that they are all but useless to educators” (Bass, 2021c, n.p.). Truitt’s comment in opposition to the AHS stands in stark contrast to the comments made during Phase Two by pro-traditional AHS NCSBE member Olivia Oxendine. As discussed earlier, during Phase Two, Oxendine voiced concern that diversifying the AHS would make them too specific and simply a topical list but here, Truitt is arguing that they are too broad. In Phase Four, pro-traditional AHS members changed positions, arguing that the AHS should be more specific and topical, a clear contradiction to their earlier stance.

The contrast between these arguments illustrates that the pro-traditional AHS policymakers are now using coded language to find other reasons to object to the AHS instead of explicitly critiquing the standards' inclusive language. The use of coded language demonstrates how whiteness is present while remaining concealed in the debate about the AHS (McClure, 2021). Additionally, using a national report from a conservative think tank on state-level policy

rhetoric during this phase continues to illuminate how conservative NCSBE members engaged in the spectacle, or the theater of policy making (Carpenter, 2017; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the debate surrounding the North Carolina American History Standards (AHS) highlights the ongoing tension between inclusivity and the status quo, which I argue is the continued and unsurprising normalizing of whiteness in American education (Hyttén & Warren, 2003; Matias & Boucher, 2023). Delineating the four phases of rhetoric demonstrates how pro-traditional AHS voices used different frames to discourage the inclusion of marginalized perspectives and the acknowledgment of systemic racism (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; DiAngelo, 2018). As previously mentioned, viewing the development of the AHS as four phases allows for a more critical analysis of how multiple policy streams and windows influenced the policy development process (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011). Ultimately, the approval of the AHS with some modifications reflects a step towards inclusive education. However, the pro-traditional AHS rhetoric highlights the ongoing need for critical conversations about the role of whiteness in American education.

National Influence Through Diffusion, Policy Windows, and Agenda Setting

Throughout my data analysis, I consistently found that policymakers' decisions about the AHS in NC connected to broader issues regarding standards, curriculum, and the ongoing struggle between political factions to shape the messages imparted to students. Three of the four actor groups, pro-EPF, pro-traditional AHS, and pro-inclusive AHS, pointed to national events such as the summer of racial reckoning and other states' standards. The next section, presents evidence to demonstrate that the policies developed by the NCSBE did not materialize in isolation but were part of a national discourse concerning indoctrination and the teaching of

"hard history." Recognizing the link between national and state-level politics provides valuable insights into my first and second research questions, which examine the extent of national-level policy discourse influenced by NCSBE discourse and the extent the NCSBE influenced the AHS. Additionally, since national discourse focused on race and the teaching of inclusive history, understanding its influence on the NCSBE helps to answer my third research question on how the AHS maintains whiteness. In adopting the AHS, NCSBE members used discourse comparing NC to other states, referencing the summer of racial reckoning, and following language from Trump's 1776 Project.

Comparison to Other States

Pro-EPF policymakers frequently referenced other states to advance adopting the course. When rationalizing the offering of the Personal Finance course, NC General Assembly members and Governor Cooper emphasized that reducing American History to one course aligned with 47 other states (Hui, 2020a). When referencing most other states, lawmakers implied that since most states follow this guideline, the guideline is best practice. During the January 1, 2020 State Board Meeting, Deputy Superintendent David Stegall stated, "U.S. History in 47 other states is one course. We're not trying to go against the grain. This is more the norm" (Hui, 2020a). Stegall argues that EPF being the norm justifies NC's adoption of the course.

Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest also commented that, "There are states that do this really well. They are much further down the road than we are. Let's borrow from the people who are doing well to get started" (Hui, 2020a). Forest is referring to how other states already offer strong EPF courses, and that should be the model DPI uses to create standards for the course. While Stegall's and Forest's comments point towards a diffusion model of politics, they illustrate

how NC policymakers' awareness of other states' policies impacts their policy decisions (Rippner, 2016).

Another way that comparison to other states appeared in the rhetoric is through the release of the Fordham Institute's *The State of State Standards for Civics and US History* report. Published in June 2021, this report graded all 50 states' Civics and US History State Standards. Since the NCSBE approved the AHS in February 2021, the report graded those standards for NC. The Foreword of the report offers the following analysis:

Sixteen jurisdictions made our reviewers' honor roll with grades in the A or B range for their standards in both civics and U.S. History.... Encouragingly, these states run the gamut from deep red to deep blue. They serve over 25 million K–12 students—roughly half the country's total public-school enrollment. Still, that leaves thirty-five states that earned Cs or worse, including twenty that got unsatisfactory marks (i.e., Ds or Fs) in both subjects (Stern et al., 2021, p. 4).

North Carolina is part of the twenty that received Ds or Fs in both subjects. Pro-traditional AHS NCSBE members used these scores to encourage re-creating the standards. References to this report and lawmakers' interpretations of this report were so dominant in the discussion of the Unpacking Documents that the local media frequently cited this report. Local media's citation of this policy document demonstrates how pro-traditional AHS advocates used this report to further a policy spectacle by rationalizing their claims with language from a think tank (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011).

The following quote from *The Raleigh News & Observer* exemplifies the local media's portrayal of the importance of the report (Hui, 2021n):

Much of the discussion Thursday focused on a national report released last month from the Fordham Institute that gave North Carolina a D- grade for its new civic standards and an F grade for its U.S. History standards... (n.p.).

While the article then shares comments from Deputy State Superintendent David Stegall about how the grade results from differing philosophies of what standards should be, the article ends with comments from State Superintendent Catherine Truitt about how this report validates her belief that the NC standards are inadequate Hui (2021n) reports:

But Truitt said the template that was used to develop the standards was flawed. She said the standards are so broad that it will prevent students from getting equitable access to good instruction.

“The purpose of state standards, I would argue, is the state of North Carolina putting a stake in the ground and saying this is what is important for students to know and to understand,” Truitt said (n.p.).

While Truitt does not reference the report, her comments that the template for the adopted standards is flawed mirrors the language presented by the Fordham Institute’s report, which critiques the AHS for being “nebulous” and having “an aversion to specifics” (Stern et al., 2021, p. 246). Prior to this comment, the board had a lengthy discussion about the impact of the report from the Fordham Institute. Additionally, her rhetoric around needing to change the standards for students to get “equitable access to good instruction” is manufacturing a crisis to engage with a political spectacle (Horsford et al., 2019; Slater, 2015). Truitt can validate her claims based on a national think tank report comparing state standards, demonstrating how a national think tank can influence a state-level political stream (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011).

Summer of Racial Reckoning

As noted previously, there were early calls for inclusion in the AHS before June 2021. However, at the height of America's summer of Racial Reckoning, these calls for inclusion in the AHS increased. These increased calls for inclusion demonstrate how the summer of racial reckoning served as a focusing event to elevate the condition of racial injustice to a problem, influencing the policy streams and creating a policy window (Diem et al., 2018; Kingdon, 2011). At the June 4th, 2020, meeting, NCSBE Member Jill Camnitz requested that the board take an intentional approach when looking at language in the standards due to the context of the time. She asked:

...listening carefully to the concerns and keeping in mind our focus on equity and the reality of our world right now; I'm wondering if it's possible to take some time to maybe look...at least at the initial first three paragraphs of the American History standards and add some language in there that might be clarifying...Is that a possibility? (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a, n.p.).

During the July 8, 2020, Meeting, NCSBE Member JB Buxton opened the discussion on the AHS with the following comment:

I think we've discussed before a lot of questions, not just in our state but across our country, about the degree to how we go about teaching our history and social studies, the perspectives that are included, [and] the issues that are addressed. While these are not new questions, they've certainly developed a new set of urgency. And as a state in the country, we're reckoning with these issues. And so, this adoption comes at a particularly compelling and important time (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b, n.p.).

Similarly, during this meeting, Board Member James Ford stated the following:

...we want these narrowing targets to reflect the demands of this current moment and the demands of so many stakeholders and communities that are sort of being marginalized... to make sure that...we are producing more socially conscious and empathetic individuals to help create a better, more perfect union (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b, n.p.).

Both meetings and all three of these comments occurred during the summer of 2020 protests against racial injustice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In the context of when the meetings occurred, two weeks after the murder of George Floyd, phrases such as “our focus on equity and the reality of our world right now,” “new set of urgency,” “reckoning with these issues,” and “demands of this current moment” are all references to the 2020 racial reckoning. While protests did also occur in North Carolina, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, and the subsequent heightened racial awareness were national events that reverberated across the globe. The connection between these national events and North Carolina education policy provides evidence to show how multiple streams and a combination of state and national events create policy windows (Horsford et al., 2019; Kingdon, 2011).

President Trump’s Agenda Setting

In September 2020, President Trump established the 1776 Commission to ensure the “patriotic education” of students in America and to undo the “twisted web of lies” being taught in American schools about systemic racism (Kaplan & Owen, 2021). Trump’s executive order condemns “a radicalized view of American history” and argues that “viewing America as an irredeemably and systemically racist country cannot account for the extraordinary role of the

great heroes of the American movement against slavery and for civil rights”. Before December 2020, during the debate about the AHS, neither North Carolina policymakers nor the media mentioned Critical Race Theory nor the importance of teaching (or not teaching) Critical Race Theory in schools. However, once the Republican Party’s national agenda included fearmongering around Critical Race Theory, that rhetoric became present in the debate about the AHS.

Starting in January 2021, with the election of high-ranking Republican officials in North Carolina and Trump’s release of the *1776 Report*, Critical Race Theory became a buzzword in North Carolina; NCSBE conservative members intertwined Critical Race Theory with the AHS. During the February 2021 NCSBE meeting, NCSBE Member Amy White, a pro-traditional voice, explicitly named the connection between the opposition to the AHS because of the words “systemic racism,” “gender identity,” and “systemic discrimination” in Draft Four and the opposition to Critical Race Theory. She stated:

So, when we talk about [these] three words in context that have been lifted from a very radical theory, a very radical ideology that has been used and promoted...you might ask yourself, how did those of us who have advocated so fiercely in opposition to the standards come to the conclusion that they were anti-American, anti-democratic, anti-capitalist? It's because of the other conversations that are going on and the three keywords that have been amended since then (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p.).

The “radical ideology” that White is referring to is Critical Race Theory. Her language parallels Trump’s Executive Order Establishing the 1776 Project, with White focusing on the keyword “systemic” and the theory’s “radical” nature.

While Draft Four contains the phrase “systemic racism” and “systemic discrimination,” before Draft Four of the AHS, “systemic” was rarely mentioned in NCSBE discussions. While there were repeated calls for more explicit language to ensure inclusive standards during the summer of 2020, the phrase “systemic” was only mentioned twice in media coverage of the AHS creation and never explicitly stated by NCSBE members. In the two NCSBE meetings and nine news articles about the NC Social Studies standards in January and February 2021, “systemic” was mentioned forty-five times. The numerous mentions of “systemic” in media coverage demonstrate how the media helped to mediate this political spectacle (Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019).

The opposition to the term “systemic” can be seen in Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson’s comment ahead of the February 2021 Board Meeting, “I am diametrically opposed to that...I do not believe that we live in a systemically racist nation, nor have we ever lived in a systemically racist nation” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p.).

Even with the removal of the term “systemic” from the AHS, members of the NCSBE continued to express concern that the AHS would still imply that racism was systemic. NCSBE Member Oxendine stated:

I believe “systemic” was removed from the term “systemic racism.” I believe “gender” was removed...[from] the term “gender identity.” Now to me, I would still need to know how... “racism” minus “systemic” [and] how “identity” minus “gender” is contextualized...in the objectives. Just removing words doesn't change the intent of the objective (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p.).

Perhaps the strongest example of opposition to the standards came from Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson. In a January 27th, 2021, Press Release, Robison claimed:

Instead, they [the standards] have been crafted by those on the radical left with an explicit agenda of being divisive, promoting left-wing ideology, and indoctrinating our students within public schools...The message here is clear. America is a racist nation with systems in place designed to discriminate against minority groups. The implication? That you should hate our great nation (Office of Lieutenant Governor, 2021, n.p.).

In this quote, Robinson explicitly names what Oxendine and Truitt hinted at when talking about tone and intent; they believe that teaching about systemic racism is the same as teaching students to hate America.

The rhetoric used by NCSBE members to change the language of the AHS and its tone show a direct relationship to the fear President Trump created around Critical Race Theory. Board members were not concerned or discussing “systemic” until President Trump released his 1776 Executive Order. The 1776 Executive Order and NCSBE comments portray viewing racism as systemic as viewing America as an irredeemable nation. This national fear directly influenced NCSBE members to remove the word “systemic” from the AHS; this removal exemplifies how the AHS uses whiteness to protect white supremacy through individualizing racism (DiAngelo, 2018). Additionally, Trump’s language and other pro-traditional NCSBE members repeatedly used the phrase “radical” to describe the Left and their ideology, creating a specific name for enemies and furthering the political spectacle (Anderson, 2007; Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019).

Movement Towards Inclusive Language Prior to and During a Policy Window

Data analysis reveals that Drafts One, Two, Three, and Four of the AHS progressively became more inclusive. While Draft Five did less to displace whiteness than Draft Four, the approved version still created more inclusive standards than earlier versions. From a theoretical

framework, Draft Four is also a suitable point of reference because DPI created this version in response to the policy window created by the focusing event of the summer of racial reckoning (Kingdon, 2011). Draft Five resulted from the anti-Critical Race Theory political spectacle that followed (Edelman, 1988). The comparison of drafts of standards provides insight into how inclusive standards existed in the policy solutions stream before the summer of racial reckoning and on the limited, yet significant impact, of the conservative political spectacle.

The change in language across the drafts allows a more precise portrait of how the standards writing committee added inclusive content throughout the standards, both on their own volition and at the request of the board. Additionally, the NCSBE influenced the language in the standards, as I discussed in previous sections; national discourse influences NCSBE members' requests, which also helps address my first and second research questions. My analysis of the language of the standards and the language in the supporting documents will focus on what inclusivity looked like prior to Draft Four, changes in Draft Four, and the changes in supporting examples from the official Unpacking Document

Progress Before Draft Four

As discussed in a previous section, except for a few isolated calls before June 2020, the NCSBE and the AHS committee did not explicitly aim to ensure inclusion in the AHS. Instead, during the first phase, policymakers focused on balancing history and personal finance courses. However, as the standards writing committee made changes from Draft One to Draft Three, the changes tended to center more on perspectives from people and groups of color. For example, Table 4.2 outlines the changes from Draft One to Draft Two in the economics section.

Table 4.2 Changes to AHS from Draft One to Two in the Economics Section

Standard	Draft One	Draft Two
AH.E.1	AH.E.1- Analyze American capitalism in terms of affluence and poverty	AH.E.1 - Analyze the American economic system in terms of affluence, poverty, and mobility .
AH.E.1.1	Did not exist	AH.E.1.1 - Deconstruct multiple perspectives of American capitalism in terms of affluence, poverty, and mobility.
AH.E.1.3	AH.E.1.3 - Critique the monetary, fiscal, and regulatory policies of the federal government in terms of their origins and impacts on various social class	AH.E.1.4- Explain the causes of monetary, fiscal, and regulatory policies of the federal government and related impacts on affluence, poverty, and mobility.

Note. Bolded words indicate added language between the drafts.

From NC Department of Public Instruction - North Carolina Standards for American History Draft 1 (2019) and North Carolina Standards for American History – Draft 2 (2020a)

Changing the standard from “American capitalism” to “the American economic system” disentangles American identity from capitalism, altering the tone of the standards. The intentional move to add more inclusive content can be seen in the addition of AH.E.1.1, which explicitly asks teachers to include material that contains differing perspectives on capitalism. Additionally, in AH.E.1.3 (Draft One)/AH.E.1.4 (Draft Two), the addition of the term “related impacts on affluence, poverty, and mobility” ensures that teachers cannot just teach about the impact of a policy on the upper and middle class. Instead, to meet the standard, teachers must include voices of people experiencing poverty.

These changes in the economic standards include adding the word mobility to all three standards. With the weak framing of the AHS and with standards not functioning as curriculum, it is hard to interpret how the addition of “mobility” will impact instruction in the classroom. Examples of mobility could serve to include counternarratives, such as Madame C.J. Walker, which emphasize examples of marginalized groups’ resilience and brilliance. Alternatively,

examples of mobility, such as Horatio Alger, could be used to uphold the myth of meritocracy and erase systemic barriers to economic equality.

Changes Surrounding Draft Four

Draft Four is the first set of standards to result from rhetoric in Phase Two (the call for inclusion). However, a close analysis of the AHS demonstrates that language across all five drafts of the AHS was very similar. From Draft Three to Draft Four, the nine standards’ language remained the same. Of the 35 objectives (like sub-standards) in Draft Three, Draft Four saw the addition of nine new objectives, the removal of two objectives, and the altering of two objectives (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020b). Table 4.3 demonstrates the changes to objectives in Draft Four. Bold words are additions, and words with a strikethrough were deleted. The categories across the top are the disciplines dividing the standards in all five drafts.

Table 4.3 Changes to Draft Four of the AHS

Discipline Strand in the AHS	Standards that were modified between Draft Three and Draft Four of the AHS
Civics and Government	AH.C&G.1.4 Explain how systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America.
Economics	AH.E.1.4 Explain how monetary, fiscal, and regulatory policies of the federal government have both positively and negatively impacted affluence, poverty, and mobility. AH.E.1.4 Compare how some groups in American society have benefited from economic policies while other groups have been systematically denied the same benefits. AH.E.1.5 Distinguish the role women and racial minorities have played in contributing to the economic prosperity of American society in terms of equity, equality, and mobility.
Geography	AH.G.1.2 Explain the impact of movement and settlement on the environment and culture of various places and regions. AH.G.1.3 Explain the reasons for and effects of forced and voluntary migration on societies, individuals, and groups over time. AH.G.1.4 Explain how slavery, forced migration, immigration, reconcentration, and other discriminatory practices have changed population distributions and regional culture

Behavioral Science	<p>AH.B.1.3 Critique multiple perspectives of American identity in terms of oppression, stereotypes, diversity, inclusion, and exclusion.</p> <p>AH.B.1.6 Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination.</p> <p>AH.B.1.7 Explain how slavery, xenophobia, disenfranchisement, and intolerance have affected individual[s'] and group[s'] perspectives of themselves as Americans.</p>
History	<p>AH.H.1.1 Explain the causes and effects of various domestic conflicts in terms of race, gender, and political, economic, and social factors.</p> <p>AH.H.2.3 Distinguish the extent to which American foreign policy has advanced the interests of historically privileged groups over the interests of historically marginalized groups.</p> <p>AH.H.3.4 Compare how competing historical narratives of various turning points portray individuals and groups including marginalized people.</p>

Note. Bolded words indicate added language between the drafts. Strikethroughs indicate the deleted language.

From NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Standards for American History – Changes from Draft 3 to 4 (2020b)

As requested by the members of the NCSBE in the summer of 2020, the changes from Draft Three to Draft Four center marginalized voices and experiences through recurring phrases such as “marginalized groups/people,” “oppression,” and “systemic/systematically.”

GOP members on the NCSBE pushed back on Draft Four of the standards, and they focused on the phrases “gender identity,” “systemic racism,” and “systemic discrimination.” In response, the AHS writing committee omitted each of those phrases in Draft Five. However, changing “gender identity” to “identity,” “systemic racism” to “racism,” and “systemic discrimination” to “oppression” still left many of the new Draft Four objectives intact. For instance, “AH.E.1.5 Distinguish the role women and racial minorities have played in contributing to the economic prosperity of American society in terms of equity, equality, and

mobility” remains in the adopted version of the AHS. Additionally, AH.C&G.1.4, which initially contained the phrase “systemic racism,” remains in the adopted version as “AH.C&G.1.4 Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America.” Both AH.E.1.5 and AH.C&G.1.4 represent standards that explicitly call for instruction on minoritized groups, racism, and equity, which were not present prior to Phase Two rhetoric. So, while removing the terms “gender” and “systemic,” a direct result of NCSBE members’ requests, does represent a setback for teaching accurate history, Draft Five of the AHS is still a more inclusive version than Drafts One, Two, or Three.

Diversity in Supporting Examples

Drafts One, Three, Four, and Five were all weakly framed standards with almost no mention of specific historical events. However, Draft Two included a list of potential topics, or supporting examples, for teachers to use to meet the proposed standards. In June 2021, the NCSBE approved a supporting document specifying potential topics for teachers to accompany the approved Draft Five. Draft Two listed almost three times as many examples of specific historical figures as the supporting documents. However, 70% of those examples were White people. Among the few mentions of specific historical figures in the Unpacking Documents, only 16.67% of figures are white, the same number as Latino figures. The final Unpacking Document mentions more Indigenous and Black figures than White historical figures. In this final Unpacking Document, Black historical figures made the most minor gains (only increasing by 8.7%) and in absolute mentions. Table 4.4 specifies the number of mentions in each document.

Table 4.4 Specific References in Suggested Topics by Race/Ethnicity

Group	Draft Two		Adopted Unpacking Document	
	Number of References	% Of All References	Number of References	Of All References
Black	89	20.51%	44	29.33%
Indigenous	21	4.84%	26	17.33%
Latino	7	1.61%	25	16.67%
White	306	70.51%	25	16.67%
Totals	434	100.00%	150	100.00%

Note: This table was created through the data gathered in my round one of coding as described in Chapter Three.

The significant decrease in the number of White figures mentioned from Draft Two, written prior to the summer of racial reckoning, to the supporting document, written after the summer of racial reckoning, is another example of how the request of the NCSBE members and the summer of racial reckoning directly impacted the language of the AHS and its inclusion of marginalized groups. However, the relatively minor gains in including Black figures could possibly serve as one way that the rhetoric and the AHS continue to uphold anti-Blackness, which I will discuss in a later section.

Presence of Anti-Blackness, Dearth of Antiracism, and Possibilities of Racial Literacy

With whiteness as a normalizing influence in our society, it is unsurprising that the AHS and policy process also upheld anti-Blackness and did little to promote antiracism (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2003). However, even with all the ways that the AHS continues to uphold whiteness, surprisingly the AHS provides teachers with several opportunities to develop racial literacy (Grayson, 2018).

In my data analysis, I conceptualize anti-Blackness as an ideology that works alongside whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018). While whiteness justifies itself as the dominant ideology, anti-Blackness is more than the racism against black people but rejects the notion of their humanity

(Dumas & ross, 2016). Antiracism and racial literacy are beliefs, ideologies, and strategies that can help displace whiteness and anti-Blackness. I conceptualize antiracism as values and practices that advance racial equity and racial literacy as practices that develop criticality for discussing race (Diem & Welton, 2021; Grayson, 2018).

While this may seem like a haphazard section, all these ideologies and practices, anti-Blackness, antiracism, and racial literacy, can maintain or displace white supremacy, the primary lens of my study. Scholars have argued that anti-Blackness is the lever which white supremacy rests (Dumas & ross, 2016). Antiracism is the way to remedy the past ways where whiteness has created racial inequities (Kendi, 2019). By examining the presence of anti-Blackness, antiracism, and racial literacy in the AHS and the discourse, I can better answer how the AHS maintains whiteness. The presence of anti-Blackness rhetoric and limited antiracism rhetoric in both discourse and the AHS demonstrates that the NCSBE continued to influence the AHS in a way that supports whiteness. However, the AHS contains possible ways for teachers to instill racial literacy, which could disrupt this dominant ideology.

Appearances of Anti-Blackness

Anti-Blackness most clearly appeared in the policy process when the NCSBE reviewed the supporting documents for the standards. While the AHS are “weak” framed standards, lacking a prescribed set of facts, the NCSBE approved a supporting document that suggests topics for teachers to use to meet objectives. In the first review of the supporting document in June 2020, NCSBE members felt frustrated that the examples lacked equal representation of groups.

State Superintendent Catherine Truitt led this critique by saying during an NCSBE Meeting, “There was a disproportionate number of topics for any given standard or objective that

had to do with one community over another. So, I asked the team to go back and have more proportionality of topics to go with specific standards and objectives” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021e).

When fellow NCSBE Member James Ford pressed Superintendent Truitt to identify what groups she saw as overrepresented, Truitt pointed out that in the standard exploring the impact of experiences and achievements of marginalized groups on American Identity, 13 of the 17 suggested topics related to African American figures and experiences. Truitt also pointed out that 13 of the 25 suggested topics for explaining racism, oppression, and discrimination were African American figures. Truitt summarized her feelings by stating, “There was nothing about European discrimination of various groups, antisemitism, Asian slavery, etc.” (Hui, 2021i; NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021e).

Critics, such as Black minister and social justice activist Paul Scott, argued that Truitt feared the curriculum would be “too Black.” He said to the Raleigh News and Observer, “How dare she further marginalize the descendants of Africans who were brought here in chains! Our children deserve better!” (Hui, 2021i). However, Lori Carlin, the Department of Public Instruction Chief of Social Studies and Arts Education, claimed they “fixed” the issue, and DPI approved the supporting documents in the summer of 2021 (Hui, 2021i).

As noted in an earlier section, the gains in discussions about Black individuals in the final supporting document were minimal compared to Latino, Indigenous, and Asian/Pacific Islander groups. One example of this depreciation is the standard on “Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination.” This standard now contains 30 examples; 15 relate to Black experiences. While the committee added 13 more

examples, they only added two more referencing Black culture (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a; 2021c).

Additionally, one of the added examples is Allan P. Bakke, a White man who actively sued to end affirmative action to admit minoritized communities into universities (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). Equating Bakke's experience with "discrimination" to the oppression faced by Fannie Lou Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper and voting rights activist, minimizes the Black experience in the AHS and amounts to anti-Blackness.

The other standard that Truitt critiqued, "Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America," contains 19 examples in the finalized supporting documents (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). As weakly framed standards, teachers are not expected to cover all or even any of these supporting documents if the objective is met. This trimmed-down list of examples only contains six examples that explicitly relate to the Black experience, as opposed to the earlier 13. The standards writing committee met Truitt's desire to see phrases like "antisemitism" and "European discrimination". In the 19 topics are: antisemitism, Irish, Quakers, and Catholics. Many of the remaining examples could relate to the Black experience, such as "educational access," but are also such vague phrases that teachers could easily use them in a race-evasive way culture (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a; 2021c). By creating a dichotomy between Black and white content choices and favoring the white content choices, the AHS manifests an anti-Black ideology and furthers white supremacy (Dumas & ross, 2016).

The Dearth of Antiracist Language

While there were many calls to diversify the AHS and the AHS moved towards a more inclusive perspective, there are few examples of antiracist language in this political process. Most of the rhetoric of the policymakers and the language of the AHS called for “diversity,” “inclusion,” and “equality.” Policymakers wanted to see these AHS become more culturally responsive so that students knew what it meant to be “good citizens.” Policymakers rarely spoke of wanting to disrupt racism. With the removal of the word “systemic” from describing racism and oppression, one can assume that policymakers were at least not concerned and at most comfortable upholding this system, especially when pressed by fellow NCSBE member Ford. Prior to voting on Draft Five, Ford made a substitute motion to vote on Draft Four, identical to Draft Five except for the term “systemic”. This motion failed with only Ford and Kenan voting in favor of it, the five other pro-inclusive AHS NCSBE members voted against considering Draft Four (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings; 2021d). The unwillingness of the five other pro-inclusive AHS board members to consider Draft Four, the most inclusive version of the standards, illustrates the performative nature of their rhetoric (Anderson, 2007; Carpenter, 2017; Koyama & Kania, 2014). Additionally, their lack of support for the motion demonstrates how they maintain whiteness by valuing group solidarity over a critical push for inclusive standards (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2003)

The closest public comment to antiracism came from NCSBE Member James Ford. In the June 2020 meeting, Ford argued, “So all the words...about us working to absolve racism and white supremacy. This to me is a document that is a tangible way for us to do that. Now, with that, as a frame I look at, I said, ‘Are we doing that in this process?’ And I can't say that I'm looking at (that); whether it be the founding principles, whether it be the U.S. History

document...” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a). In this comment, Ford directly states that the AHS are not doing enough to work against racism, yet ultimately all but one of his Democratic colleagues supported a watered-down version of the standards. Furthermore, the lack of White Democrat NCSBE members' willingness to enact more antiracist standards that include systemic inequities demonstrates the performative nature of politics, as they engaged in pro-inclusive rhetoric (Carpenter, 2017). This lack of willingness also illustrates the ways in which white progressives frequently cause damage to people of color by spending more energy on seeming racially progressive than on engaging in antiracist practices (DiAngelo, 2018).

The only time the word antiracism appeared in the policy process was in a *News & Observer* article in July 2021. This article appeared as the NCSBE approved the supporting documents, but the General Assembly was trying to pass a bill limiting the teaching of Critical Race Theory. The newspaper article states, “Republican Senate Leader Phil Berger and GOP Lt. Governor Mark Robinson have pointed to how ‘antiracism’ professor Ibram X. Kendi spoke at a Charlotte-Mecklenburg school event to argue that Critical Race Theory has crept into NC public schools.” (Hui & Doran, 2021). This quote demonstrates the fear around antiracism and perhaps why even antiracist advocates limited their use of antiracist language.

Racial Literacy

As a reminder, Grayson (2018) developed a set of points to identify the practice of racial literacy. Racial literacy is using critical language to examine race (Grayson, 2018). I used Grayson’s (2018) framework to analyze the AHS for racial literacy practices. Six practices are not seen at all in the rhetoric surrounding the creation of the AHS and three traits may be present depending on the policymaker and teacher. Three of the points for racial literacy have a

foundation in the discourse and AHS, but it would still be up for the teachers to implement it in their classrooms. Table 4.5 lists each of Grayson’s (2018) points in connection to their presence in the AHS.

Table 4.5 Presence of Racial Literacy Characteristics in Policy Rhetoric and AHS

Presence of Racial Literacy Characteristics	Grayson’s (2018) Racial Literacy Framework applied to the AHS
<i>Not At All Present</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the cultural value of Whiteness • Development of language practices through which to discuss race, racism, and antiracism • Provision of conceptual and discursive practices through which to interrogate race • Belief in the constructedness and socialization of racial identity • Ability to decode race and racialism • Recognition that race, racialism, and racism are contextual
<i>Potentially Present</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to Black produced media and symbols of historical and cultural Black struggles • Views of race on psychological, interpersonal, and structural levels
<i>Foundationally Present</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of race as it intersects with other demographic factors, including but not limited to ethnicity, socioeconomic class, geography, and gender • Consideration of the ways in which race and racism are influenced by other factors, such as class, gender, and sexuality • Recognition of racism as a contemporary rather than historical problem

Not At All Present

As discussed in previous sections, whiteness manifested itself in many ways through the policy process and in the AHS. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the language around the AHS creation and the language of the AHS does not recognize and works to uphold the cultural value of whiteness.

The following two characteristics of racial literacy emphasize the ability of one to discuss race, racism, racialism, and antiracism. With many NCSBE members focusing on “inclusion” and requesting the inclusion of a variety of European groups, antiracist language is missing in the

policy process. Since most policymakers lack this skill set, they did not advocate for the AHS to include teaching these discourse moves.

The last three characteristics that are not present all emphasize distinguishing between race, racism, and racialism and the contextual factors that led to their creation. Throughout the policy process, policymakers did not debate if race and racism were actual. However, the debate over and elimination of the phrase systemic racism removes developing an accurate historical understanding of the development of racism (which was systemic), as discussed in the previous section on whiteness.

Similarly, by starting the American History Course in 1763, the Department of Public Instruction erased the racialization of America and critical historical events such as writing whiteness into the colonial codes and the creation of race as a response to the racist system of slavery (Coates, 2015; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2016). These events all led to racialization in America. Without an understanding of these events, students miss an opportunity to develop racial literacy by studying the initial construction of race in America.

Potentially Present

Two characteristics to develop racial literacy are potentially present in the AHS: exposure to Black media and symbols and viewing racism on differing levels.

At the July 8th, 2020, meeting, several Black students spoke about their experience taking a social justice history course and learning about events, such as the Wilmington Massacre (NC Department of Public Instructing Meetings, 2020b). The Unpacking Document includes the term “Wilmington Massacre” and other Black historical figures (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). However, since these are just “suggested” examples, it is outside of the scope of this study to measure how extensively the teacher created curriculum will expose

students to these events and, more importantly, Black-produced media of these events. The teacher could simply refer to the event as the Wilmington Coup and instead of developing racial literacy, the teacher would uphold white supremacy (Goldstein, 2018; Ward & Buchanan, 2021).

To understand racism on different levels, the standards call for students to examine how racism shaped their understanding of identity and access to power in the United States. Examining racism from this lens opens students to understanding racism on a “psychological, intrapersonal, and structural level” (Grayson, 2018). However, with the removal of the word “systemic” from the standards, policymakers made it clear that teachers can decide how much structural racism is included in their curriculum (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021d). I classified this racial literacy characteristic as potentially present as the language emphasized intrapersonal racism over systemic racism.

Foundationally Present

Due to the loose framing of the standards and the topics in the supporting documents being “suggested,” understanding how teachers will implement these standards is outside the scope of this study (Sleeter and Stillman, 2005). Therefore, there are several habits of racial literacy that the AHS provides a foundation for, but teachers could have an alternate understanding of the standards (Goldstein, 2008; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Throughout the standards adoption process, pro-inclusive lawmakers made it clear that they desired the teachers’ implementation of these standards to contain inclusive content. However, teachers are their own policy actors and make their own choices (Cohen, 1990; Goldstein, 2008).

In the new American History course, the standards were written to have teachers cover history through the most recent presidential election, bringing history to the present day.

Supporting examples include phrases such as “growing diversity of the Fortune 500 list,” “voter oppression,” and “de jure vs. de facto segregation” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). These terms illustrate that teachers can teach about present-day issues and current racism while remaining in the course framework. While adopting the standards, policymakers continually suggested that this document needed to “meet the current moment” due to the ongoing racial reckoning, again bringing racism into a contemporary context (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020a). However, given that the standards are weakly framed and lack required content, teachers have the discretion of how much current content they choose to incorporate into their courses.

Whiteness Through Individualism, Monolithic Groups, and Unitive Rhetoric

Like other studies, in my data analysis I found that whiteness was a dominant ideology in the standards (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; McClure, 2021; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Both the rhetoric surrounding the creation of the AHS and the language of the standards themselves demonstrated many examples of whiteness. Examining the language of standards for whiteness helps to answer my third research question: to what extent does the AHS maintain whiteness? Furthermore, examining how whiteness appears in both the standards and the policy discourse further illuminates how NCSBE discourse influenced the standards. I organize the following section by the rhetoric maintaining whiteness that frequently occurred in the standards and discourse: Individualism and the Good/Bad Racist Binary, Diverse Groups as Monolithic and Auxiliary, and the Validation of Unity and Progress.

Individualism and the Good/Bad Racist Binary

On Feb 2, 2021, WRAL published a political cartoon, Figure 4.1, by Dennis Draughon titled “Learning Social Studies.” This cartoon featured an Elephant labeled “GOP Members State

Board of Education " holding a paper titled "New 'Inclusive' Social Studies Standards" with a red "x" on it. The elephant states "We prefer to start with a clean slate." This cartoon appeared two days before the scheduled NCSBE vote on Draft Five (Draughon, 2021). Seth Effron, Opinion Editor of Capitol Broadcasting, released a statement saying:

Editorial cartoons are creative and provocative, using hyperbole and satire. No one believes Republicans on the State Board of Education are members of the Ku Klux Klan. The editorial cartoon by Dennis Draughon is meant to point out that these members of the State Board are trying to wipe out from the social studies curriculum the record of racism which includes the Klan and the segregationist practices that were imposed in our state and nation's history (WRAL, 2021a, n.p.).

Figure 4.1 WRAL's "Learning Social Studies" Cartoon



Note: Copyright; Draughon, D. (2021, February 2). *DRAUGHON DRAWS: Learning social studies*. WRAL.com.

Lieutenant Governor Robinson held a press conference that day. Michael Whatley, the NC Republican Party Chair, introduced him, saying:

We are talking about social studies standards that are nothing, if not divisive. In fact, they are so divisive that when Republicans...stand up and talk about what is in those specific standards, we get cartoons that are calling them racist, despite the fact that we have a Native American and a black member on that board... (WRAL, 2021b, n.p.).

During the conference, Lieutenant Governor Robinson stated:

And if they're [AHS] not divisive, how in the world have we ended up here? A teacher in a North Carolina middle school would draw a drawing like that depicting the first black lieutenant governor as a Ku Klux Klansman. It's something we cannot stand for, folks (WRAL, 2021b, n.p.).

At the NCSBE Meeting on February 3, a day after the cartoon's publication, Mark Robinson continued by saying, "When you have television stations depicting a black man as a Klansman.... A Native American woman as in the Klan...These standards are divisive, and they have become divisive" (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p.) NCSBE Member Olivia Oxendine also stated, "I'm disappointed that perhaps I'm at fault. My comments over time around the issue of these social studies standards have led to a very disturbing cartoon that takes me as a Klansman...Now, how does that affect me?" (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p). Member Amy White, a Republican, also stated in the meeting, "So what I'd share with you today is Dr. Martin Luther King's voice of peace...I would ask that we move forward with that same spirit of peace...Words are powerful. Images are powerful" (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p). At the end of the meeting, Chairman Eric Davis shared a statement co-created with

Superintendent Catherine Truitt. As part of this statement, Davis read, “We would like to express our dismay about...some of our members being associated with the KKK...This information is absolutely inaccurate and unfair to the individuals involved” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c, n.p). Chairman Eric Davis’s, a Democrat and pro-inclusion AHS advocate, statement on the cartoon further solidifies whiteness by prioritizing group solidarity over critiquing racism (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2023).

As previously noted, I believe that people of color cannot be racist but can act in ways that secure whiteness as society’s dominant ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018). The binary rhetoric, which appeals to extremes, used by NCSBE members in the wake of the cartoon is one way in which discourse around the cartoon upholds whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2013). Members continually upheld the idea that people were either extreme KKK-level racists or not racist (Matias & Newlove, 2017). Their comments showing umbrage at being called racist reflect the belief that “racists are mean people who intentionally dislike others because of their racism; racists are immoral” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 13). The discourse demonstrates that people felt the attack was personal, which kept the focus on racism being individual as opposed to systemic and institutional. This particular focus upholds white supremacy because there is no attempt to understand how racism occurs at a collective level and hurts people at a collective level (Hytten & Adkins, 2001).

Specific comments from NCSBE members discussing the cartoons particularly exemplify manifestations of whiteness. Amy White, a white Republican NCSBE member, made sure to speak last in the conversation about the impact of the cartoon, affectively centering white women in the conversation. Additionally, her reference to Dr. King simplifies his work to wanting a

color-evasive world; a standard move by “nice white ladies” (DiAngelo, 2018; Matias & Newlove, 2017).

Removal of the Phrases “Systemic” and “Gender”

As noted above, and an impetus for the previously discussed cartoon, pro-traditional AHS NCSBE members mainly targeted the phrase “systemic racism,” “systemic discrimination,” and “gender identity.” During the January 27th meeting, Superintendent Catherine Truitt stated, “...systemic racism does not imply that certain laws or policies are racist. Systemic racism indicates that our entire system of government and our Constitution...as it is written in it and has been amended, are racist” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b, n.p). During the same meeting, Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson stated, “The system of government that we have in this nation is not systemically right. In fact, it is not racist at all” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021b, n.p).

Truitt’s and Robinson’s comments use a discourse of whiteness to protect white supremacy by denying the existence of systemic racism. This belief then allows for perpetrators of racism to come from one group of individuals (ex: slaveholders) and is an aberration, halting conversations that could displace whiteness as the dominant ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; McClure, 2021).

In response to board members’ comments, the NCSBE approved a glossary to accompany the AHS and other social studies standards. The glossary defines racism, discrimination, and identity. Figure 4.2 is an image shown to the NCSBE during the January 27th, 2021, meeting to help define the terms.

Figure 4.2 Glossary Terms Presented to the NCSBE

Snapshot of Supporting Documents	
Discrimination	Discrimination is made up of actions based on conscious or unconscious prejudice that favor one group over others in the provision of goods, services or opportunities.
Identity	Identity is an awareness of one's own values, attitudes, and the characteristics that define a person as an individual and as a member of different groups. It is the way an individual views themselves as well as how they are viewed by others. Some examples of types of identity may include religious, gender, ethnic, racial, regional, socio-economic, educational, and ability.
Racism	Racism can be defined as a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. The concept of racism is widely thought of as simply personal prejudice, but in fact, it is a complex system of racial hierarchies and inequities. At the micro level of racism, or individual level, are internalized and interpersonal racism. At the macro level of racism, we look beyond the individuals to the broader dynamics, including institutional and structural racism.
Glossary of Terms	

Citation: NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings. (2021b, January 27). *Called Meeting of the North Carolina State Board of Education - Jan. 27, 2021* [Video]. YouTube.

In the AHS, Standard AH.C&G.1.4 states, “Explain how systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America”. This was one of the few standards that used the term systemic during Draft Four (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020b). In the adopted version of the AHS, that standard now reads, “Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020c).

The glossary and Standard AH.C&G.1.4 represent ways that rhetoric from NCSBE members manifested in the standards. The glossary and the AHS giving the same weight to interpersonal racism as it does to systemic racism represent ways that the AHS reifies whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2003). By minimizing the role of systemic racism, the AHS wording allows teachers to instruct that racism in American history is the result of individual actions, as opposed to embedded in the founding of America (McClure, 2021).

Omission of the Word White

One of the main manifestations of whiteness is the way which it remains invisible yet present at the same time (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021). “Whiteness language assumes readers understand that US History is the narrative about European American History” (McClure, 2021, p. 12). My analysis of the AHS reveals that whiteness is continually present even when not explicitly named.

In some objectives, the AHS call for the inclusion of “diverse perspectives” by upholding whiteness as the norm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018; McClure, 2021; (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020a). Of the nine standards, zero explicitly mention race or any racialized topics. Of the 35 objectives (essentially sub-standards), nine (26.7%) of the objectives mention teaching about “immigration,” “marginalized groups,” “minorities,” or “forced migration” (a term for both slavery and indigenous removal). This is where whiteness is displayed because teachers could ostensibly meet the other 26 objectives (73.3%) by maintaining the status quo of a whitewashed history (Conner, 2021; DiAngelo, 2018; McClure, 2021, (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020c).

In my examination, I found that 24 of the 26 examples encouraged teachers to incorporate the history of people of color (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020d). This is with a generous analysis assuming that for a topic like “manifest destiny,” a teacher will include something about indigenous Americans; when teaching the “cotton gin,” a teacher would include something about increasing the dependency on slavery. However, two objectives still have seemingly raceless examples, as demonstrated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Raceless Examples in Unpacking Document

Objective	Suggested Examples
AH.B.2.2 Distinguish [between] religious beliefs and human reasoning in terms of their influence on American society and culture	American Revolution and the Enlightenment; American Revolution and religion; The Federalist Papers; Second Great Awakening; Transcendentalism; Utopian communities; Social darwinism; Social gospel; American pragmatism; Scopes Trial; Evangelical Movement; Moral majority
AH.E.1.3 Explain the causes of economic expansion and retraction and the impacts on the American people	French and Indian War Debt; Panics of 1800s; Speculation; Buying on margin Credit; Roaring 20’s; Great Depression; New Deal; Great Society; 1950’s consumerism; Industrialization; Mass production; E-commerce; Economic policies; Interest rates; Dot Com bubble; Real Estate bubble; Great Recession; Economic stimulus

Note: Examples are capitalized as they appear in the Unpacking Document

From NC Department of Public Instruction. (2021c, July 15). *American History Unpacking Document, Fall 2021 Implementation*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/american-history-unpacking-document-fall-2021-implementation>

While a culturally responsive antiracist teacher could use the suggested examples to teach about how Social Darwinism justified the eugenics of many marginalized people in North Carolina in the 20th century or critique 1950s consumerism for its redlining and discriminatory GI Bill practices, teachers would already have to be aware of these histories to incorporate them. A suggested example for AH.B.2.2 could have been the relationship between slavery, abolition, and Christianity, Richard Allen and the A.M.E church, or the role of Black spirituals and the fight for social justice. Similarly, AH.E.1.3 could have easily included the South’s “Cotton Kingdom” from enslavement as an example of economic expansion. However, by having all of these “raceless” examples, the AHS becomes a history of white people. Objective AH.E.1.4 furthers the raceless aspect of AH.E.1.3, as demonstrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 AH.E.1.3 and AH.E.1.4 in the Unpacking Document

Objective	Suggested Examples
AH.E.1.3 Explain the causes of economic expansion and retraction and the impacts on the American people	French and Indian War Debt; Panics of 1800's; Speculation; Buying on margin Credit; Roaring 20's; Great Depression; New Deal; Great Society; 1950's consumerism; Industrialization; Mass production; E-commerce; Economic policies; Interest rates; Dot Com bubble; Real Estate bubble; Great Recession; Economic stimulus
AH.E.1.4 Compare how some groups in American society have benefited from economic policies while other groups have been systematically denied the same benefits	Alexander Hamilton's financial plan; Slavery; Indian relocation; Freedmen's Bureau; Reconstruction; Black Wall Streets; Robber Barons/Captains of Industry; Sherman Antitrust Act; Great Depression; Fair Labor Standards Act; Social security; Equal Pay Act of 1963; Great Society; Medicare; Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972; Globalization; Reaganomics; Welfare reform; Great Recession

Note: Examples are capitalized as they appear in the Unpacking Document

From NC Department of Public Instruction. (2021c, July 15). *American History Unpacking Document, Fall 2021 Implementation*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/american-history-unpacking-document-fall-2021-implementation>

Taken together, these two standards paint a picture that the overarching narrative of American History is economic expansion, retraction, and larger (i.e.: white) cultural impacts; the differing impact of these programs, such as segregated aspects of the New Deal or unequal access to real estate due to redlining, is auxiliary to the overarching (i.e.: white) narrative. By not explicitly naming whiteness, these objects conceal the power of whiteness while still upholding whiteness as the dominant narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021).

The Portrayal of Marginalized Groups

Whiteness is encoded in the AHS by portraying marginalized groups as monolithic and their history as auxiliary to the story of American history (McClure, 2021).

In an earlier section, I discussed how the economic objectives of the AHS portray the impacts of economic policies on marginalized groups as a secondary objective. These objectives

are just one example of the ways that the history of marginalized groups is played as secondary to a broader (i.e.: white) historical narrative. For instance, objective AH.B.1.6 states, “Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021a). While it is important that standards recognize the triumph these groups have made over oppression, the standard only focuses on the struggle these groups endured. Missing from this standard and the other standards in the AH.B.1 strand is a requirement to understand how marginalized groups contributed to larger American society through cultural moments and innovation. While I am not suggesting the standard should portray White Americans as benevolent saviors, this standard also silos marginalized groups into their own category, as if they lack meaningful interactions and coalition building with other groups. In this standard, marginalized groups are seen as auxiliary because their only contribution to American History was against discrimination (Journell, 2018; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012). Another example of this auxiliary portrayal of marginalized groups appears in the Civics and Government strand as demonstrated in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Marginalized Groups in the Civics and Government Strand in the Unpacking Document

Objective	Supporting Examples
AH.C&G.1.2 Critique the extent to which various levels of government used power to expand or restrict the freedom and equality of [the] American people.	Declaration of Independence, State Constitutions, U.S. Constitution, Alien & Sedition Acts, Slave codes, Virginia & Kentucky Resolutions, Fugitive Slave Act, Slavery, Bill of Rights, Civil War, Marriage laws, Jim Crow , Black codes, Emancipation Proclamation, 13th, 14th, 15th Amendments, American internment camps , Blue laws, Great Society, Redlining , Eugenics, Gerrymandering, Indian Removal Act, Sundown towns , House Un-American Activities Committee, Patriot Act, Lilly Ledbetter Law, Affordable Care Act
AH.C&G.1.4 Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of	Indian Removal Act , Reservation system, Antisemitism, Enslaved people, Irish, Quakers, Sharecropping/tenant

indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America.

farming, **Jim Crow**, **Sundown towns**, **Redlining**, Mormons, Voter suppression, Voter restrictions, De Jure and De Facto segregation, **American internment camps**, **Marriage laws**, Relocation, Catholics, Educational access, Criminal justice system

Note: Bolded words were added to indicate repeating supporting examples in both objectives.

Examples are capitalized as they appear in the Unpacking Document

From NC Department of Public Instruction. (2021c, July 15). *American History Unpacking Document, Fall 2021 Implementation*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/american-history-unpacking-document-fall-2021-implementation>

While the supporting examples demonstrate that DPI did not intend for AH.C&G.1.2 to be race-evasive, the framing and phrasing of the standards continue to perpetuate that discrimination is something supplementary to the American narrative. Teachers could meet both standards using supporting examples in a way that reifies whiteness. For AH.C&G.1.3, teachers could focus on state constitutions and the Alien & Sedition Acts, supporting the theory of states' rights and nullification. For AH.C&G.1.4, teachers could focus on the history of how Irish Catholics also experienced racism and became "white," which furthers the perception of America as white and trivializes racism (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten and Warren, 2003). By separating the role of government from racism, the AHS frames racism as something distinct and supplementary instead of something embedded in the decisions and actions of the American government. While six terms appear in both examples, many of the examples appear in only one objective. This lack of continuity furthers the idea that racism and the government should be separated. With this framing, a teacher could use the "Civil War" to teach AH.C&G.1.2 and suggest the issue of freedom was the issue of states' rights to sovereignty through a race-evasive narrative. Similarly, a teacher could use the "criminal justice system" to discuss how racism leads to the unequal mass incarceration of people of color without ever discussing how systemic

government policies, such as the War on Drugs, have created this inequality. Separating racism and marginalized groups from other standards maintains whiteness by allowing these instances to seem expendable and abnormal (McClure, 2021; Vasquez Heilig, 2012).

Another way the AHS maintains whiteness is by erasing differences within marginalized groups, particularly for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. For instance, the Unpacking Document mentions “Japanese internment” six times as a supporting example (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). However, five of those mentions use the phrase “American internment camp,” which erases the impact of this policy specifically on Japanese Americans. Another example of erasing differences occurs when the AHS mentions the United Farm Worker Organization and obscures the role of Filipino Americans. “United Farm Workers,” “Delano Grape Strike,” “Cesar Chavez,” and “Dolores Huerta” are all supporting examples; however, missing from the list are “Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee” or “Larry Itliong,” examples which would highlight the coalition building of Filipino and Mexican workers during this strike, as opposed to only focusing on the work of the Mexican organizers (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). The lack of meaningful inclusion of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans demonstrates an erasure of ethnically diverse cultures, which then portrays their culture as irrelevant and ultimately manifests whiteness (An, 2016; 2018; McClure, 2021).

Indigenous groups are particularly monolithic in the AHS. While there are 25 mentions of American Indians, there is only one mention of a specific tribe, the Seminoles, as part of the “Seminole War” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). This language in the framing means that when teaching about the Indian Removal Act and Trail of Tears, teachers can

suggest that this happened to all Indigenous Americans instead of specifically articulating the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw tribes.

Similarly, a supporting example is “Wounded Knee,” but there is no clarity to show if the supporting example is referring to the massacre or the occupation, and there is no specific mention of the Lakota people. Perhaps this monolithic portrayal is most egregious in Objective AH.B.1.1, “Critique multiple perspectives of American identity in terms of American exceptionalism,” and suggests as a supporting example “American Indian” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021c). While the objective seeks inclusion of multiple perspectives, using “American Indian” as a suggestion frames American Indians as one perspective, suggesting that all indigenous Americans felt the same at every point in American history (Barbour et al., 2007; Journell, 2009a; Sabzalian et al., 2021).

During NCSBE meetings about the AHS, even pro-traditional AHS members presented concerns about marginalized groups being presented as monolithic.

This was mainly brought up by NCSBE member Olivia Oxendine when she shared her fear that the standards would become too topical because of inclusion, as previously discussed. Oxendine stated at the July 8, 2020, meeting,

I can give you 25 topics, folks, right now related to the culture and history of Lumbee Indians. And now multiply that by the other seven tribes in North Carolina. And then I will also say to you, who is going to be at the table to decide? Which of those events, which of those historical moments, which of those important topics related to the Native American in North Carolina are going to make it into that? (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2020b).

While Oxendine’s comment is anti-inclusion because she feels an inclusive list for all tribes is too long, her comment recognizes variations within tribes within North Carolina. The response to her comment was for NCSBE member Buxton to suggest that the board waits for the Unpacking Documents. As discussed, the Unpacking Document simply uses the phrase “American Indian.” Instead of working to craft a standard that recognizes the variations in tribes without creating an extensive topical list, the board accepted that had inclusivity occurred when mentioning “American Indians.” The board settling for the inclusion of marginalized groups instead of recognizing the unique experiences and contributions of the marginalized groups is one way that the NCSBE maintained whiteness in their discourse and perpetuated the “illusion of inclusion” as seen in other social studies standards (Anderson & Metzger, 2011; Conner, 2021; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Belief in American History as Unitive

One of the ways that the policy discourse around the creation of the AHS and the way the AHS upholds whiteness is through the belief in unity or wanting to uphold group solidarity and praise progress (DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Warren, 2003). Educators and policymakers can reinforce white supremacy when they promote standards that establish universal values, otherize groups in relationship to those values, view racism as an anomaly, and promote a belief that history is the story of progress (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Hytten & Warren, 2003; McClure, 2021). Throughout the creation of the AHS, NCSBE members used rhetoric that the standards should be “unitive” and included that language in the official preamble.

Many policymakers claimed they wanted standards to help create a “more perfect union,” referencing the preamble of the United States Constitution. During the January and February

2020 NCSBE meetings, when debating Drafts Four and Five, members used the phrase “more perfect union.” At the January 27th, 2021, meeting, Member Matthew Bristow-Smith stated:

When it comes to facing the hard truths of our American narrative, what and how we teach history in our public schools matters. And it matters incredibly at this moment in history...It gives us an opportunity to create an empowered citizenry that can work toward a “more perfect union” ... (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021b, n.p.).

At the February 3rd, 2021, meeting, Superintendent Catherine Truitt proposed a preamble to put alongside the standards document to help alleviate the “negative” tone of the standards. When sharing the preamble, Truitt stated, “Let us study the past such that all students can celebrate our achievements towards a more perfect union while acknowledging that the sins of the past still linger in the everyday lives of many” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021c, n.p.). Chairman Eric Davis replied, “I stand with the superintendent and support this preamble...as a continuing part of our progress towards that more perfect union” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021c, n.p.). After about an hour of conversation, Member Jill Camnitz stated: “But I believe that as we benefit from the vision of the Founding Fathers, we also owe it to them and to our fellow citizens to continue their efforts toward a more perfect union” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021c, n.p.). The NCSBE approved the preamble. This preamble is available alongside the standards and contains the phrase, “Let us study the past such that all students can celebrate our achievements towards a more perfect union while acknowledging that the sins of our past still linger in the everyday lives of many” ((North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021b, n.p.)

By continually evoking this phrase, NCSBE members perpetuate the idea that by learning American history, Americans will become more united. Both pro-inclusive AHS and pro-traditional AHS policymakers used this phrase, demonstrating the salience of the belief that America should be “a more perfect union.” However, when using this phrase, NCSBE members do not acknowledge that enslavers penned these words as they sought to use laws that reduced enslaved people to three-fifths of a person. Whiteness manifests itself here by promoting this unitive idea as a universal value, seeing the founding of the nation as raceless, and continuing to emphasize that the nation is progressing towards this raceless “perfect union” ideal (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012).

Alongside striving for a “more perfect union,” NCSBE members frequently spoke about not wanting the social studies standards to divide students during the January and February 2021 meetings. During the January 27th, 2021, meeting, Board Member Amy White stated:

But I think that our nation is better together than it is divided. And I believe that if we allow these standards to allow the creeping in of negativity, the creeping in of the dismantling of democracy, [and] the creeping in of an idea that this nation is not great... in 20 years, we'll be scratching our heads saying we did this (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021b, n.p.).

At the February 3rd, 2021, meeting, Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson argued, “These standards are divisive, and they have become divisive” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021c, n.p.).

However, pro-inclusive AHS NCSBE members did push back against this divisive idea. At the January 27th, 2021, meeting, Board Member James Ford tried to expose the whiteness in the divisive narrative by responding to criticism with the following comment:

And so now we're kind of using terms like divisive, right? Which is very nebulous and to me, just means...exposing divisions, pre-existing divisions. But it's not clear to me— for whom is this divisive? We've articulated whom we want to include; whom are we claiming that this is divisive for? We should be super specific and not beat around the bush on that. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021b, n.p.)

At the February 3rd, 2021, meeting, Chairman Eric Davis stated:

But one thing that makes me even angrier is when I'm told that I can't handle the truth of my families or my nation's history, as if somehow, I'll be less proud to be a Davis or an American if I know the full history. Or that I'll think less of my ancestors if I learn about their struggles. Or that I'll use the truth to sow division with my neighbor. You know, the one thing that might make me a little less proud is to be denied the truth by those in authority over me, only to later discover the truth on my own (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Public Meeting, 2021c, n.p.).

While Ford's and Davis's comments make clear that comments about the “divisive” nature of the standards protect white fragility, or attempts to insulate White people from racial stress, their responses are the only two comments pointing this out (DiAngelo, 2018). There are 28 mentions in the coded articles describing or quoting politicians about the “divisive” nature of the standards, despite most NCSBE members favoring the standards. This exemplifies how the American media historically favors conservative critiques on social studies topics and how pro-traditional policymakers created a spectacle with pointed rhetoric (Edelman, 1988; Horsford et al., 2019; Shuttlesworth & Patterson, 2020). Additionally, this focus on division emphasizes how

the problem is not that inequity exists but that naming the inequity causes discomfort (DiAngelo, 2018).

Aside from the preamble document, a separate policy document to clarify the tone and intent of the standards, messaging about unity and division, is largely absent from the AHS and supporting document. Standard AH.B.1 states, “evaluate American identity in terms of perspective, change, and continuity,” which implies a common shared identity that unites Americans (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021a, n.p.). However, the objectives provide an opportunity to critique that notion and examine how marginalized groups have contributed to that identity.

Like language about unity and division being largely absent from the AHS, language about progress was also relatively absent from the AHS. A vital component of the “more perfect union” rhetoric is that the standards did not tell the linear story of progress and would therefore lead students off-path from the overarching course of progress. Standard AH.B.2 states, “Analyze the relationship of tradition and progress in terms of scientific, technological, intellectual, and cultural development” Americans (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021a, n.p.). While this standard does call for an analysis of progress, this standard does not assume that progress is linear. Instead, the standard notes a tension between tradition and progress, helping to obscure the narrative of history that whiteness upholds, which is one of linear progress (McClure, 2021).

While discourse and rhetoric around the AHS heavily included language about unity through phrases such as “more perfect union” and “divisive,” the AHS themselves do not reflect this belief. This difference between discourse and the AHS is significant in demonstrating one

way that the NCSBE rhetoric did not influence the shape of the AHS, as well as demonstrating one way that the AHS displaces whiteness.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of the study revealed that the adoption process of the AHS occurred in four phases, which aligned with a national policy window and national political spectacle. In this chapter, I highlighted how NCSBE members used coded rhetoric, framed racism as individual, and shared anti-Black sentiments. Unsurprisingly this rhetoric upheld whiteness and whiteness was ultimately reified in the standards. While the majority of findings were expected, it is important to note that the adopted AHS ended up as a more inclusive version than Draft One and did provide some opportunities for teachers to develop racial literacy in students. With a clear understanding of the findings in place, I now shift the focus to interpreting and contextualizing these results in the broader context of research on whiteness, policy windows, and social studies standards.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

In the previous chapter, I addressed my findings around the discoveries that emerged from coding the standards and discourse about the standards. In this chapter, I analyze and discuss the relationship between my findings and relevant literature. First, I will focus on how my findings answer each of my research questions. I will then move to how the AHS exemplifies national trends with social studies standards and fits into broader discussions on policy windows. I will end with implications and suggestions for future research.

My overarching research question is, “How do policy windows shape the way educational policy actors maintain or disrupt whiteness during a standards adoption process?”. Policy windows, or the opportunity for a particular policy agenda to be pushed forth, played a significant role in allowing for the NCSBE to adopt more inclusive standards. While after January 2020 pro-traditional NCSBE members pushed for the removal of specific terms and worried about the negative tone of the standards, many objectives that promoted an inclusive curriculum were added after the death of George Floyd and remained intact in the adopted AHS. Even though the NCSBE did not adopt the most inclusive version of the standards, which were present in Draft Four, the adopted standards still promote a more inclusive telling of AHS than Drafts One through Three. There are added objectives remaining such as “AH.B.1.6 Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination” (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2021c).

Discussion

The Influence of the NCSBE

The first research question I examined was *How did discourse in the NCSBE influence the AHS?* When other states have previously adopted contentious social studies standards, the state board of education has played a role in creating the dispute and working towards adoption of the controversial standards. Yet in these different disagreements across states, the state board of education has played a different role. In Virginia, four members of the state board of education wrote social studies standards (Fore, 1998). In Texas, the state board of education was not directly involved in writing the standards but swayed the standards writing committee into writing social studies standards imbued with themes of American exceptionalism (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019). By exploring the influence of the NCSBE members' discourse on the AHS, I seek to understand how state boards use language when navigating contentious social studies standards.

Analysis of the NCSBE meeting and drafts of the AHS reveals that while the NCSBE members were not able to write the standards like Virginia, they were able to limit the language included in the standards. Additionally, as in Texas, the NCSBE members' discourse influenced the standards writing committee of the ideology presented in the standards. Yet, with the changing NCSBE members over the course of the adoption process, the NCSBE's discourse influenced the standards by both limiting the influence of a white supremacy ideology and creating a stronger presence of this ideology in the standards.

The NCSBE's ideological influence in creating the standards is seen in the changes between Draft Three to Draft Four. In the wake of the summer of racial reckoning, which I argue was Phase Two of the rhetoric, NCSBE asked that the standards contain more intentional

language to ensure teaching of inclusive history. While the NCSBE was not specific in exact phrases they wanted in the standards, their request marked a departure from the assumed timeline because traditionally the NCSBE adopts Draft Three of proposed standards. The NCSBE unanimously called for more time to create inclusive history standards. The standards writing committee met this request by adding phrases in Draft Four, such as “systemic racism,” and adding nine objectives that focus on teaching an inclusive history. The changes to standards in Draft Four because of the NCSBE changing the adoption timeline and providing requests to the standards writing committee illustrate how a state board can ideologically influence standards.

After the 2020 election, in what I describe as Phase Three, the NCSBE rejected inclusive language in the standards, specifically the phrases “systemic racism,” “systemic discrimination,” and “gender identity.” The writing committee removed these phrases from Draft Five, which the NCSBE ultimately adopted. Superintendent Catherine Truitt believed the tone of the standards was “too negative” and wrote a preamble for the standards, which the NCSBE adopted as an official policy document. Finally, when discussing suggested examples to accompany the standards, Superintendent Catherine Truitt successfully argued for more “diverse” examples, which led to fewer Black figures and more examples of white diversity. The changes between Draft Four to Draft Five provide another example of how a state board of education can ideologically influence standards, even without sitting on the writing committee. It also demonstrates how without being on the committee, a state board of education can very specifically influence language in social studies standards.

Yet, the back-and-forth nature of the AHS debate also demonstrates how the ability and desire of a state board of education to influence standards is heavily dependent on how the board can define problems. During Phase Two, NCSBE members were able to define racism and

systemic inequities as a problem that should be addressed by the standards. During Phase Three, NCSBE members were able to define discussing systemic racism as the problem. While the definition of these problems was influenced by larger state and national events, recognizing that problem definition furthered the NCSBE's discourse helps one understand their influence through policy windows and political spectacles (Edelman, 1988; Kingdon, 2011). Using rhetoric to change the problem is what allowed one collection of NCSBE members to undo the work of earlier NCSBE members and manufacture more controversy into a political spectacle (Horsford et al., 2019).

National Policy's Influence on State-Level Policy

My second research question was: *How does national policy discourse influence state-level policy discourse?* I found that national policy discourse is crucial because of how national events shaped how NCSBE members discussed their understanding of problems in the US, such as racism and the teaching of Critical Race Theory. Additionally, I found that the AHS mirrored national trends in the framing and purpose of social studies standards, which is also a point of national policy debate.

Policy Windows and Political Spectacles

My answer to this question can best be understood using Kingdon's (2011) multiple streams theory and Edelman's (1988) political spectacle theory. Both theories focus on the occurrence of agenda setting and the passage of policy because of conditions becoming defined as problems, allowing for more attention and urgency to the issue (Edelman, 1988; Kingdon, 2011).

The focus on inclusivity in the AHS resulted from a national policy window, as several factors converged to allow the NCSBE to push for more inclusive standards. (Kingdon, 2011;

Rippner, 2016). While the standards writing committee progressively added more inclusive language prior to the summer of racial reckoning, the NCSBE intentionally delayed adopting the standards to ensure more inclusivity. This delay occurred weeks after the murder of George Floyd and amidst national discourse on how to create a more antiracist society.

During this period when the NCSBE focused on inclusivity, which I labeled as Phase Two, all three political streams converged and created a policy window (Kingdon, 2011). Prior to the murder of George Floyd, the NCSBE had a majority of Democratic members, which created an ideal political stream for an aligned electoral and partisan leadership (Kingdon, 2011). The standards' writing committee was already trying to add more inclusive language, illustrating that the solution stream, or policy proposals from researchers and interest groups, included ideas for inclusive standards. The murder of George Floyd elevated racism from a condition to a problem, which created a change in the problem stream, which shifted the national mood to focus more on systemic racism. The conversion of these three streams created a policy window and allowed for the agenda-setting and formation of more inclusive standards (Kingdon, 2011).

The pushback against inclusive standards also followed a national political spectacle where problems are continuously reconstructed to win support for political causes (Edelman, 1988). In response to the summer of racial reckoning, right-wing politicians attempted to reconstruct the problem of racism. This political spectacle started on the national level with Donald Trump's 1776 Commission. This commission sparked a hysteria over CRT and framed teaching about racism as "divisive" (Smith, 2021). Pro-traditional NCSBE members used similar language to denounce the AHS for being "ideologically driven" and "divisive" (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021c). During Phase Two of the AHS adoption, the rhetoric defined the problem as racism existing and not being taught enough. However, with the

1776 Commission, the NCSBE entered Phase Three and reconstructed the problem as teaching about systemic racism.

While this spectacle resulted in the NCSBE eliminating “systemic racism” from the standards, the more inclusive tone of the AHS remained intact otherwise. However, this spectacle continued as Republicans called for revising the AHS, especially in the wake of the Fordham Institute’s report, which gave the AHS a low rating for its weak framing. Additionally, ongoing legislation about teaching CRT in North Carolina and other states continued to show this political spectacle on both the state and national level.

Limits of National Influence

While national policy windows and spectacles influence the debate on the tone and language of the standards, national policy plays a limited role in providing models and goals for social studies standards. The Introductory Statement to the standards states that students should become college, career, and civic life-ready through the course, referring to the National Council for Social Studies' adoption of the Common Core. However, NCSBE members’ discourse did not focus on how the standards would help students accomplish that goal. Other than the Fordham Institute Report, released after adoption, NCSBE lawmakers did not reference other national reports, standards, or recommendations to guide “best practice” in writing social studies standards. While other states inspired EPF’s adoption and initiated the writing of the AHS, NCSBE members did not turn to other states as exemplars either. National policy and events undoubtedly influenced NCSBE’s broad understanding of the purpose of social studies courses; however, NCSBE members’ requests for the AHS did not seem to pull from more technical studies or examples of social studies standards, clearly showing a limit to the influence of national policy.

NC Standards as an Example of the National Social Studies Trends

The AHS reflects the trends of the national debate about social studies standards. The development of social studies standards in the early 20th century aimed to promote citizenship and democracy, which were explicit goals of the NCSBE when crafting the standards (Evan 2004; Saxe 1991). NCSBE Member Duncan’s quote at the January 27th, 2021, meeting emphasizes the need to promote citizenship, as he explicitly links the purpose of history with building character and democracy. He stated:

What is the purpose of history?...there are exceptionalism...pieces of our history that need to be lifted up because they provide inspiration...More importantly, they provide instruction for our young people. It's a type of character, and the type of lives, that need to be led for democracy to truly succeed.

During the Cold War, the purpose of social studies became more focused on patriotism with a renewed focus on strengthening democracy (Byford & Russell, 2007; Evans, 2004). During this period, a proposed national framework faced strong criticism for focusing too much on multiculturalism as opposed to democracy and patriotism (Evans, 2004). Comments by NCSBE Chair Eric Davis and State Superintendent Truitt recognized this tension with their comments at the February 3rd, 2021, NCSBE meeting. Comments from each of them emphasized the need for a positive tone in the AHS to “celebrate our achievements” to create a “more perfect union” with an acknowledgment of “the sins of the past” and “opportunities to learn from our shortcomings.”

The weak framing of the standards, or emphasis on skills instead of content, also aligns with national trends in education since the adoption of the Common Core Standards (Dover et al., 2016; Reinhard, 2014; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). The National Council for Social Studies

used the Common Core Standards to craft the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework, which includes weakly framed standards (Dover et al., 2016; Reinhard, 2014). In the first sentence, the opening statement to the adopted AHS explains that the course will “provide students the opportunity to engage in intensive application of the skills, concepts, processes, and knowledge gained in previous social studies courses and prepare them to be college, career, and civic ready.” Missing from this sentence is any explicit mention of what content is needed to accomplish this goal; however, this introduction includes a heavy emphasis on skills and critical thinking. The ending phrase of this first sentence mirrors the language of the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework. With the weak framing of the AHS, there is an entire strand focused on inquiry skills, or conducting and presenting research; none of the AHS standards or objectives mention specific historical figures or events. This emphasis on skills over content heavily exemplifies larger national trends in social studies.

The AHS’s weak framing provided a point of contention in both national and state policy. During Phase Two, which occurred during the summer and fall of 2020, pro-traditional lawmakers, such as NCSBE member Olivia Oxendine, feared that creating inclusive standards would simply create a checklist of required grade-level content (July 8th meeting). The Fordham Institute’s report on the state of social studies standards, which was released in June of 2021 and ranked the NC AHS an F, heavily criticized the AHS for being weakly framed. The report stated that the conceptual nature of the AHS and its lack of any required topics made the standards poorly organized and “functionally contentless” (Stern et al., 2021, p. 246). NCSBE Chairman Davis’s response to this critique was that DPI had a different philosophy for social studies standards than the Fordham Institute NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2021f). However, State Superintendent Catherine Truitt cited the Fordham Institute’s report as a

reason to completely re-do the standards (Bass, 2021f). Truitt made these remarks after her inability to amend the AHS of its “negative tone” and ensure the Unpacking Document included more non-Black examples. Throughout the debate of adopting the AHS, pro-traditional lawmakers like Truitt and Oxendine utilized language about the framing of the standards to justify their arguments against more inclusive standards. While pro-traditional lawmakers used both arguments for and against stronger framed standards, their references to the content over skills debate alongside the release of the Fordham Institute demonstrate how the national framing debate impacted the NCSBE’s debate about the AHS.

Manifestations of Whiteness

The third research question is: *How did the state-level discourses and the AHS maintain or disrupt whiteness?* Like other states adopting social studies standards, policy actors in North Carolina battled over the balance of diverse perspectives versus the traditional knowledge present in the standards (Fore, 1992; Placier et al., 2002; Noba, 2011). In other states and NC, this controversy focused on the weak framing of the standards and omission of certain content, such as Sandra Day O’Connor (Hui, 2021m; Fogo, 2015; Placier et al., 2002).

A Policy Window Creating Progress

Unlike other states, which typically end with a more traditional version of standards from Draft One to the final adoption, the adopted standards promote a more inclusive version of American History than Draft One (Fore, 1992; Noba, 2011; Placier et al., 2002). The standards writing committee added phrases to promote inclusion prior to the summer of racial reckoning, such as “deconstruct multiple perspectives of American capitalism...” As a result of the policy window from the summer of racial reckoning, the NCSBE delayed the adoption of the standards to ensure inclusion. In response to this delay, the standards writing committee added nine more

objectives and modified two to reflect a more inclusive history in Draft Four. All eleven of these objectives remain in the adopted version of the AHS, with the word “systemic” erased from only one objective. The convergence of multiple streams in the summer of 2020 created a policy window and allowed policy actors to promote their agenda of more inclusive social studies standards (Kingdon, 2011). Even though pro-traditional lawmakers criticized the inclusive AHS agenda and created a political spectacle in response, the policy window, due to the summer of racial reckoning, still allowed for the adoption of more inclusive social studies standards (Kingdon, 2011; Edelman, 1988). While the phrase “systemic” no longer appears in the AHS, other phrases the committee added such as “systemically denied,” “racism,” and “xenophobia” remain. The political spectacle against inclusive standards has so far been less effective than the inclusive policies from the policy window. While the policy creation process did not create linear progress, and instead was more of two steps towards inclusivity and one-step back, the policy window did create some lasting progress towards inclusive standards and displacing whiteness.

Continuing to Manifest Whiteness

While there are improvements towards inclusivity in the standards, the findings in my study are consistent with the findings of other studies on social studies standards, in that the language of the AHS and policy discourse around their creation uphold white supremacy (Anderson & Metzger, 2011; Conner, 2021; Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). The removal of the term “systemic” promotes the idea that racism occurs mainly on an individual level instead of a societal level, which is one of the main ways that whiteness is reified. As Bonilla-Silva (2018) and others have said, this portrayal of racism promotes a myth of progress and minimizes race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McClure, 2021; Smith, 2012). In addition to the wording of the standards, the NCSBE discourse around racism,

especially after the WRAL cartoon when the members took extreme offense for being compared to the KKK, further highlights how the NCSBE tried to minimize race and make instances of racism seem as if they were the exception (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012; Ward & Buchanan, 2021).

Finally, the discourse and standards upheld whiteness by also upholding beliefs of anti-Blackness, showing not only a preference for white individuals but a distinct dislike of Black people (DiAngelo, 2018; Love, 2019). Anti-blackness appeared in comments by State Superintendent Catherine Truitt. While other BIPOC groups gained more examples in the different Unpacking Documents between Draft Two and Draft Four, Black people were mentioned less frequently. Additionally, pro-traditional NCSBE members asked for examples of European immigrants experiencing discrimination and obstacles instead of the listed examples of mostly Black individuals. These comments reflect how the board members continued to uphold whiteness by seeking privilege for white groups and erasing the history of state-sanctioned discrimination against other BIPOC groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; Utt, 2018).

Implications

The findings from my research offer insight into education policy in North Carolina. As the 2024 election approaches, presenting a political change, understanding education debates about adopting the AHS offers insight into potential impacts of a new policy window (Kingdon, 2011). Additionally, viewing teachers as street-level policy actors offers an opportunity to understand how the AHS can be pushed to be more inclusive, outside of current policy debates (Dover et al., 2016; Goldstein, 2008).

Current Debates in North Carolina

The debate over teaching inclusive history is still ongoing in North Carolina. After the 2022 midterm elections, Republicans gained a stronger majority in the NC House of Representatives and continued to try to limit the teaching of inclusive history. Mark Robinson used his visibility from the AHS debate to launch a gubernatorial race. Finally, as counties implement the AHS, the development of curriculum remains contentious.

Role of the NC House of Representatives

While the NCSBE ratified the AHS in February 2021, the debate over the standards and teaching race in North Carolina remains ongoing. In March 2023, the Republican majority in the NC House of Representatives passed a bill limiting the teaching of Critical Race Theory and topics that make students uncomfortable. House Democrats argue that an accurate history course inevitably make students uncomfortable. The NC Senate has yet to ratify this bill. Governor Cooper vetoed a previous version of the bill in 2021, but after the 2022 election, Republicans gained a larger majority in the House, making it possible to override a veto (Associated Press, 2023).

GOP House members are also pushing for more control of the content of history courses by advancing a bill to create a Standards Advisory Commission. If the bill passed, the Republican-controlled legislature will appoint members to the commission, and the commission will be responsible for selecting standards to teach in classrooms. Under the current bill, the commission would recommend changes to the social studies standards by January 1, 2025 (Hui, 2023).

Mark Robinson's Gubernatorial Run

In April of 2023, Mark Robinson, one of the most vocal critics of the AHS, announced his campaign for North Carolina Governor. Included in the vision on his campaign website is the following statement, “As Lieutenant Governor, I have had the privilege to work on a lot of issues, but my focus has been on education. It is a passion of mine and the reason I ran for Lieutenant Governor. I have been a vocal proponent of parents knowing what their children are being taught” (*Meet Mark*, n.d.) This statement clearly illustrates how he plans to continue constraining what topics teachers can cover in the classroom.

Current National Debates

While I focused on North Carolina for this study, similar debates are occurring nationwide. In 2021, the Texas legislature passed a bill that limited how teachers can discuss race in the classroom, including “saying that slavery constitutes the true founding of the United States” (Education Week, 2021). As a response, the Texas State Board of Education passed a measure allowing for a revision of the social studies standards to comply with the bill but delayed a full rewrite of the standards. During this process, critics on the state board of education felt that the current standards did not reflect the diversity of the Texas student population (Molestina, 2022). Like Texas, the Florida legislature banned instruction on topics suggesting people are oppressed or privileged based on race. In July 2023, the Florida State Board of Education approved a new set of social studies standards which include a middle school standard requiring instruction on “how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit” and a high school social studies standard that required instruction on “acts of violence perpetrated against and by African Americans” when teaching about American racial massacres” (Chavez, 2023).

While Texas and Florida provide specific examples of states alongside North Carolina debating the portrayal of race in the social studies standards, these states are not the only ones. Since 2020, eighteen states (including Florida and Texas) passed a ban on teaching critical race theory in K-12 schools. Only three state governments (Delaware, Vermont, and California) have not introduced measures condemning CRT (UCLA Law School, n.d.). Twenty-eight states are in a situation similar to North Carolina; a state-level body introducing a measure banning critical race theory, but not yet law. Most states' policies exist in an in-between area exemplify how understanding the distinct roles of the state legislatures, the state board of education, local districts, and teachers provide clarity on how to protect and implement an inclusive curriculum.

Additionally, the in-between nature of many states in allowing CRT demonstrates how the anti-CRT political spectacle is on the verge of moving from agenda setting to policy implementation, but they have yet to find the right convergence of streams in each state to experience a policy window. Pro-traditional lawmakers have already manufactured a crisis about the teaching of CRT and crafted policy solutions to stop this, showing that some advocates and bureaucrats have primed the solutions stream for anti-CRT policies. Yet the fact that many states have not fully passed and implemented these solutions demonstrates a lack in either the conditions stream or political stream. The problem stream could be unaligned with the solutions stream if national and state moods do not shift enough to believe that teaching about CRT is divisive and an actual problem. If currently elected officials in multiple levels of government, such as executive and legislative, do not want to fight an anti-CRT battle, then the political stream is currently diverging from the solutions stream (Edelman, 1988; Kingdon, 2011).

Without a much more detailed analysis of what is happening in each state and at what scale, I cannot precisely argue which streams currently are aligned with anti-CRT policy.

However, the effectiveness of a policy window allowing the NCSBE to pass a more inclusive AHS, even with pushback, demonstrates that if anti-CRT and pro-traditional lawmakers can create and utilize a policy window, pro-inclusive advocates will face challenges and obstacles teaching inclusive history.

Suggestions for Future Research

Implementation in the Classroom

As mentioned throughout this study, the AHS are not intended to be a curriculum. The curriculum is developed by local districts and teachers, as opposed to the NCSBE (Pogratic, 2020b). Previous studies on the relationship between standards, curriculum, and instruction found that standards influence what teachers include in their curriculum. However, teachers also act as street-level policy actors who interpret standards differently and make decisions about content and instruction based on personal preference (Dover et al., 2016; Goldstein, 2008). Teachers' differing curriculums and implementation can potentially create variation in how much the omission of the phrase "systemic racism" or the addition of more inclusive standards that call for incorporating "diverse perspectives" impact classroom instruction. This is especially true in North Carolina, considered a "purple state," where approximately 36% of voters registered as independents, 35% registered as Democrats, and 30% registered as Republicans (Thompson, 2022). Teachers in a left-leaning school district, withstanding a statewide ban on CRT, could use the standards as a basis to teach about systemic racism. Teachers in a right-leaning school district could use the standards to call for "diverse perspectives" and choose the differences in experiences of Irish, German, and Italian immigrants. Further research could provide insight into how the policy discourse, the language of the standards, the policy window

from the summer of racial reckoning, and the political spectacle against CRT influence what a teacher implements in the classroom.

In addition, standards are crucial because they provide a guidepost for what students should learn and experience in a course. During the debate about the AHS, pro-patriotic NCSBE members expressed concern that students would leave the class with an overly pessimistic view of America. Similarly, pro-inclusive NCSBE members voiced that the standards needed to provide more opportunities for students to see themselves in the curriculum.

When debating the framing of the standards, some policymakers, such as Superintendent Truitt and the Fordham Institute, feared that emphasizing skills would mean students would not learn essential content (Bass, 2021f; Stern et al., 2021). Conversely, advocates of skill emphasis thought this framing was necessary to ensure the students developed 21st-century skills. While students' experiences will vary based on their teachers, future research could also investigate how students perceive America after taking the American History course and how framing impacts instruction in the classroom and students' mastery of content and skills.

Guiding Examples of Inclusive American History Standards

Many studies have focused on how social studies standards lack inclusion and minimize marginalized voices. To help standards writing committees more seamlessly create and adopt inclusive standards, more research could focus on well-done examples of inclusive American History standards. While policymakers should seek to create inclusive standards, it is impossible for a set of standards to be perfectly inclusive (Journell, 2008). However, identifying states that have more inclusive standards than the AHS, analyzing the framing of those standards, and understanding the adoption of the standards could provide a starting point for state standards writing committees, allow for policy diffusion of inclusive standards, and serve as a solution if a

policy stream opened (Rippner, 2016). The language of the AHS mirroring the language of the NCSS's College, Career, and Civic ready framework and the influence of the Fordham Institute's report on the debate about the framing of the standards provides evidence that if researchers and policy organizations promote more ideal inclusive standards, state-level policymakers will consider these recommendations when crafting their own social studies standards (Rippner, 2016).

Recommendations

Supporting Teachers

Throughout the AHS adoption debate, lawmakers on both sides spent ample time describing what they wanted students to experience in the classroom, such as being ready to “meet the current moment” or “feeling pride in our country” (NC Department of Public Instruction Public Meetings, 2020b; 2021b). However, existing research finds that students’ experience in a classroom is most directly impacted by teacher instruction (Au, 2009; Dover et al., 2016; Wills, 2019). While standards do impact teachers’ instructional decisions, weaker-framed standards provide more room for interpretation. Specifically, the weak framing of the AHS leaves ample room for teachers to act as policymakers in their classrooms, as the standards provide them with a wide range of discretion in how to teach history and the content to include (Cohen, 1990; Goldstein, 2008; Horsford et al., 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). While lawmakers provide clear, yet sometimes opposing, goals for what they want students to experience in the classroom, NCSBE members did not discuss how teachers would be trained and supported in implementing the new standards, outside of stating that would be up to local districts. Educational policies that attempt to enhance instruction for students but neglect to

improve teachers' capacity to implement these policies and evaluate their effectiveness yield minimal change (Cohen, 1990).

This broad amount of teacher discretion and lack of robust teacher support in implementation has significant implications for what students will experience in the classroom. While some teachers may provide comprehensive and critical instruction on race and racism, others may provide a shallow and incomplete understanding. This can perpetuate the “illusion of inclusion” and cause the erasure of racism in the curriculum, reinforcing the cultural value of whiteness and white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2003; McClure, 2021; Vasquez-Heilig et al., 2012).

The role of teachers in shaping the curriculum and instruction cannot be overstated. Regardless of the intentions of state policy, what children could learn depends on what their teachers make available to them. Teachers have the power to shape students’ “understanding of race and racism; their personal biases and beliefs can have a significant impact on the instruction provided, especially in the absence of strongly framed standards to guide instruction (Goldstein, 2008; Horsford et al., 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012).

Therefore, teacher education programs must provide comprehensive and critical training on racial literacy, antiracism, and whiteness to equip social studies teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to displace whiteness effectively when teaching history. Additionally, ongoing professional development and support can help teachers continue to grow and develop their racial literacy and ensure that they provide high-quality antiracist instruction to their students (Giles et al., 2013; Grayson, 2018). As many states try to ban teaching about specific topics, legal advice needs to accompany this professional development, providing insight to teachers about how to teach their specific context (Najarro, 2022).

Preparing For and Limiting Policy Windows

The process of adopting the AHS demonstrates how a policy window can move an agenda forward, even when that agenda receives pushback afterward. For a policy window to open, the problems stream, agenda-setting stream, and political stream must converge. While the problems stream and political stream are harder to control as they focus on the national mood, elections, and focusing events, policymakers, scholars, educators, and activists can control agenda setting (Kingdon, 2011). While the future of inclusive and antiracist standards in North Carolina and other states seems uncertain, eventually a focusing event or political change will present another opportunity to advance more inclusive standards. Having a policy prepared for this moment will better enable this agenda to be adopted during the standards.

Likewise, the present conditions in North Carolina indicate the existence of an agenda to limit the teaching of inclusive history and CRT. As a purple state, the political stream has mixed results with different parties controlling various parts of statewide government. However, the 2024 election could create a stronger change in this stream. Similarly, while some in the state such as Mark Robinson argue that teaching inclusive history is a problem, a focusing event changing inclusive history instruction from a condition to a problem has yet to happen. To stop the advancement of legislation that further limits the teaching of inclusive history, policymakers, activists, and educators can monitor these streams and try to limit the creation of a policy window that further limits inclusive American History standards.

Final Thoughts

Learnings about Policy Windows and Political Spectacles

While my undergraduate degree is in Political Science, I have spent the last eight years in the classroom focused on teaching history; hence, my understandings and use of political

theories was rusty before embarking in this program and study. As I reflect on what I have personally learned from the study, one of my main takeaways is the relevance of Kingdon's (2011) policy windows and Edelman's (1988) political spectacle as a framework for understanding how policy changes.

Taking a critical policy perspective, I believe that policy does not occur in a linear and rational fashion; my findings in this study very much demonstrate the non-linear nature of policy with the back-and-forth movement of inclusion in the AHS. Despite my study relying so heavily on the framework of policy windows, I believe part of the irrational fashion of policy is that other models, such as punctuated equilibrium and diffusion theory, can also provide frameworks to explain why policy changes occur.

However, conducting this study demonstrated to me the relevance of policy windows and political spectacles as a framework to understanding the making and implementation of education policy. My understanding of these phenomena is also an understanding rooted in hope. My hope comes from seeing how the adoption of the AHS occurred at a time when the state mood welcomed more inclusive standards. My hope comes from seeing how even though policymakers crafted a political spectacle and proposed solutions of less inclusive standards, the state mood did not align with these ideals and limited the impact. My hope also comes from knowing that educators worked for years before this policy window to craft inclusive and culturally responsive materials and lessons, which were inspirations for the AHS. I have to have hope that educators are going to continue to do this work so that the solutions stream is populated to create even more just education policies at the next opportunity for a policy window.

Even with this hope, I am still disheartened about the current attacks on teaching accurate history as divisive and indoctrination. I know that as policymakers continue to manufacture this reactionary political spectacle, they are more likely to change the mood and potentially open a policy window, allowing for the implementation of even more problematic legislation. While the impact of their rhetoric around the AHS was limited, the AHS would be more inclusive if the term “systemic” were still in it. While I believe my findings from this study support that the pro-inclusive history movement implemented more significant changes in the AHS, I do not want to erase the impacts and harm of the conservative reaction and political spectacle and am wary of the future effects of this rhetoric.

Still, I must have hope that the educators and other education policy actors working to create a just and liberated world for our students will continue to craft policies which will one day (and hopefully soon) be implemented.

Reflection on Implementation of the AHS

As someone who has now read extensively about the proceedings in creating the AHS and also the language of the AHS, I feel there is a disconnect between teachers and the intent of the policy. The following reflection is based on my anecdotal experience of teaching American History in North Carolina during the adoption process and the gap between my research and experiences, not on studies of implementation.

Most of my American History teacher colleagues were frustrated at this change to condense American History because of how it shortened time for them to cover everything. Many have chosen to eliminate projects to prevent eliminating any content. As weakly framed standards, the intent of the AHS is that teachers will not cover everything and instead use content as a vehicle to develop historical thinking and inquiry skills. The AHS further emphasizes this in

the thematic organization, as opposed to the chronological organization of the objectives. Except for one colleague, I do not know any other teacher that has embarked on teaching the AHS thematically. The gap between the weak framing of the standards and the content-focused approach of the teachers could occur for many reasons: the unpacking guide was not available until July before the school year started; districts may have offered funding to craft district guides but schools did not offer fundings to create a curriculum; crafting a new course is time intensive and requires a lot of work; teachers were not offered trainings by the state on how they envisioned teachers implementing the weakly-framed standards, the list could go on.

However, I think this gap is particularly noteworthy because if teachers are shirking the larger overall asked by the AHS, I am unsure how much the mandate in the AHS to teach about diverse perspectives, racism, and discrimination impacts teachers' design of curriculum. To be honest, I am not even sure if all of my American History colleagues read the AHS. Certainly, there are many educators who having read the AHS and followed the debate around are now emboldened or inspired to teach a more inclusive history, knowing they are protected by the standards. There are other educators who prior to the AHS adoption already crafted an inclusive curriculum and view the AHS as a seal of approval on these lessons. In counties that have banned CRT, they may see the AHS as a legal protection for the attempts they use at teaching racism. However, in a mostly white teaching force that faces other education issues including low pay, I feel most teachers did not seize the AHS as an intended chance to redesign their course and infuse inclusive topics in their curriculum.

I believe this disconnect between the intent of policy and teachers' understandings, reflected in the idea of teachers as street-level policymakers, demonstrates the need to really reflect on teacher training and professional development, as mentioned in my recommendations.

Before embarking on this study, I never learned about the difference between weak and strongly framed standards and the impacts of those frameworks in designing my curriculum. I was fortunate enough that my teacher training program ensure our curriculum covered diverse perspectives and experiences, which I used to craft my curriculum. I also continually sought out (paid) professional development which better prepared me to teach about systemic racism and injustice. As a lifelong learner and lover of professional development, I was shocked and saddened that there were not state or district trainings on the AHS.

But the onus of ensuring teachers are ready to implement a weakly framed standards, develop historical thinking skills, and teach inclusive history does not simply lie with states and districts. Teacher education programs have a duty to prepare their graduates to understand skills-based education and inclusive curriculum. Other agencies, such as the National Endowment for Humanities, can continue their work of supporting social studies teachers' development, but add even more of a focus on interpreting standards and teaching inclusive history.

I urge these training programs to teach teachers how to interpret weakly framed standards because I believe that these standards have the potential for the most liberatory education. The paradox of framing standards is that a strongly framed standard, even with more emphasis on inclusive history, is prescriptive and limits a teachers' ability to be culturally responsive. However, a weakly framed set of standards, which does not require any particular content, provides the teacher with more agency in meeting students' needs. I believe that weakly framed standards that acknowledge systemic injustice and paired with proper training and development are the best way to ensure the teaching of inclusive and culturally responsive history.

Conclusion

While the national policy window created the opportunity for the NCSBE to adopt more inclusive standards, the standards adoption process ultimately did not disrupt whiteness in North Carolina (Kingdon, 2011). Throughout this study, I conceptualized antiracism as actively resisting oppressive policies. Anything other than this active resistance upholds racism and white supremacy (Kendi, 2019). While North Carolina policymakers did not use overtly racist language, they perpetuated white supremacy using coded language and silence (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Pro-traditional lawmakers originally opposed inclusive standards by arguing that inclusive history taught too much content. They eventually flipped on this point arguing that the more inclusive version of the AHS did not include enough content, or the content wasn't diverse enough (i.e.: too black). The pro-traditional lawmakers utilized language from the national political spectacle to manufacture a political spectacle in North Carolina to argue that teaching about systemic racism is divisive (Edelman, 1988). The performative nature of their opposition furthers how people can further uphold whiteness through the performance they give (Gillborn, 2005).

Even pro-inclusive lawmakers continued to uphold white supremacy through their silence (Kendi, 2019). Governor Cooper vocally supported the Economics and Personal Finance course and vetoed the bill outlawing Critical Race Theory, yet he remained silent on the debate about the new social studies standards' language. The majority of pro-inclusive NCSBE members, except for Ford and Kenan, were unwilling to adopt Draft Four, the most inclusive version of the standards.

A significant part of the debate over the AHS in North Carolina was if "systemic racism" is real; the adoption process in North Carolina and the ultimate whitewashing of the AHS serves

as evidence that systemic racism and white supremacy are real and manifest themselves in the limited inclusion of marginalized experiences in American History courses.

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APPENDIX A: MATRIX FOR ROUND TWO OF CODING

From McClure, 2021, pg 23

Tenets of CRT	Individualism	Race Proof Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Race
Race is Ordinary	Whiteness is the universal race. ¹	Race is explained as abnormal. ³	White history provides guidelines to establish universal values, beliefs, and knowledge. ¹	Genocide, racism, and oppression are viewed as aberrations in our history rather than the norm. ¹
Interest Convergence	One group of individuals (i.e., slaveowners) are responsible for racial crimes rather than revealing the systematic racism and oppression of the entire nation-building process. ²	Benevolent actions by white leaders towards diverse cultures benefit white society and economy, i.e. whiteness history is patriarchal. ¹	Whiteness is on full display and invisible at the same time. ²	The story of the founding of the white nation is told as raceless. ¹
Race as Property	Property rights vs human rights. ²	Race has nothing to do with economic or class status. ²	Establishes ‘Otherness’ to promote white ideals. ¹	There are plenty of opportunities for people of color if they get out there and hustle for it. ³
Tenets of CRT	Individualism	Race Proof Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Race
Legitimacy of Knowledge of People of Color	White knowledge is individual, but BIPOC knowledge is collective. ¹	Missing in the content are meaningful representations of historical actions and interactions of diverse groups. ³	Lack of information about ethnically diverse people, issues, cultures, and experiences implies that they are not only irrelevant but expendable. ¹	Knowledge from people of color is minimalized, and crudely represented and simplified. ¹

Place Race and Racism into Historical and Contemporary Contexts	Diverse cultures are often shown as the background props to the white narrative. ¹	No context between white colonization and current societal issues. ²	Actions of white people have nothing to do with race; creating blank spaces in the historical narrative. ²	Minimization of language to protect people of color. The linear development in white history also represents human progression from primitive to civilized. ¹
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1. Adapted from Smith's (2012) *Decolonising Methodologies*

2. Adapted from Delgado and Stefancic (2017) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*

3. Adapted from Bonilla-Silva's (2018) *Racism without racism: Colour-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America.*

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