

THE DECOLONIZATION OF UNITED STATES HISTORY:
EXPLORING AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

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Like many institutions of high education throughout the United States, the University of North Texas requires all students to pass introductory United States History courses. While the purpose of these courses should be to create a population well versed in U.S. history and sociopolitical and economic context, the foundational textbooks utilized in these courses promote American exceptionalism and U.S. supremacy. Their omission of the complex and controversial history of the United States creates a false master narrative based on an idealized version of U.S. history. Even textbooks that include diversity continue to uphold a progressive master narrative that ignores issues of systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. My theoretical analysis of the required textbooks, *Exploring American Histories: A Survey with Sources*, is applicable to all introductory U.S. history textbooks. Decolonialism, critical race, and intersectional feminism are theoretical lenses that disentangle and highlight otherwise invisible aspects of American exceptionalism and the serious consequences of the subjugation of subaltern historical narratives. This thesis applies theory with examples of how textbooks or supplemental teaching can expose foundational oppression, violence, and discrimination to teach students critical thinking and help them see connections between the past and their present.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Required College-level United States History Courses

The state of Texas requires all public colleges that receive government funding to mandate two courses of United States history for all degree seeking undergraduate students.¹ The state legislature did not specify the reason such courses are necessary when they enacted this law in 1971 or amended it in 1995 and 2007. In theory, United States history courses are required because knowledge about the history of this country creates an informed population. This longstanding view still appears in the 2012 Department of Education initiative titled “Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action,” which seeks to prepare “all students for informed participation in civic and democratic life—so that all Americans are ready to tackle the challenges confronting communities and the nation in the 21st century and so that the United States can continue to serve as a model democracy for people and governments around the world.”² Citizens should be able to use this information to cultivate an understanding of current events, politics, and public figures. The need for such a program is clear across the political spectrum. The conservative American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) laments “that only 18% of the over 1,100 four-year colleges and universities in [their] study, public and private, require a foundational course in United States history or United States government.”³⁴ From a decolonial perspective, universities that do require U.S. history courses

¹Texas Education Code, §51.302 (1972, 1995, 2007).

² “Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy.” *Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy* online, U.S. Department of Education. January, 2012, <https://www.ed.gov/civic-learning>.

³ “No U.S. History?” American Council of Trustees and Alumni. https://www.goacta.org/resource/no_u-s-_history/.

⁴ The ACTA is a problematic source for myriad reasons, but they provided the only available statistics on the subject.

may still create historically illiterate citizens who go about life without a working knowledge of U.S. government and policy if they do not decolonize the master narrative.

College textbooks and dismal results from a survey of master narrative knowledge from 2000 indicate that institutions of higher education are leaving their students woefully unprepared to participate in the political processes of this nation.⁵ Universities that do mandate courses dedicated to the history of the United States seem to follow conservative and governmental mindsets that focus on traits, themes, and examples of American exceptionalism, pro-colonialism, and ultimately undergird white supremacy. Histories center Eurocentric ideals and ideologies while skimming over or fully omitting problematic and controversial histories that contextualize not only the nation's past, but also our present and future. Subaltern⁶ individuals and communities are often left out or only represented in their relationship to the dominant historical narrative. U.S. history is taught on a positively progressing linear, illustrating the improvement of our nation as a whole. These colonized themes are evident when a decolonial framework is employed to analyze thematic content within required reading materials. The current system perpetuates national mythology that include misinformation and perpetuate serious consequences and violence.

Educational requirements vary among institutions of higher education in the United States because there is no federal mandate on states or individual universities. Although the Texas law does not specify the reasoning behind the requirement of a U.S. history survey, later federal resolutions about U.S. history education define "the term 'American history and civics'

⁵ "Students Flunk U.S. History Test: Congress Calls on Teachers to 'Redouble Efforts'." *Education World*, July 7, 2000. https://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues100.shtml.

⁶ Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 2008).

[as] the key events, key persons, key ideas, and key documents that shaped the institutions and democratic heritage of the United States of America.”⁷ Based on the research conducted for this project there is a clear affiliation between the narrative of American exceptionalism and the required reading materials for these courses. This rhetoric is not always obvious or blatant. In fact, unearthing the master narrative requires exploring the histories left out of the books along with those included. Histories that are excluded, specifically histories that are not common or popular knowledge, are typically subaltern histories: women, people of color, religious minorities, and others who do not fit Eurocentric standards.

1.2 College Survey History Textbooks

The particular history textbooks used by a university’s history department are contingent on multiple factors. The university may have a contract with a specific publisher for a number of years, the price of the book may factor into the decision, and the textbook’s content is taken into consideration. In UNT’s case, the History Department has a contract to use Drs. Nancy A. Hewitt and Steven F. Lawson’s *Exploring American Histories* volumes 1 and 2 until the summer of 2023. Current members of the University of North Texas textbooks selection were not part of the previous selection process. The relatively new chairperson and Departmental Affairs Committee members empowered the Undergraduate Committee to determine textbook improvements. That committee has already decided that the department will transition to a free, open access online textbook entitled *American Yawp*.⁸ The department also requires a

⁷ Lamar Alexander, “S.504 - 108th Congress (2003-2004): American History and Civics Education Act of 2003.” Congress.gov, July 21, 2003. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/senate-bill/504>.

⁸ Personal conversation with major advisor, Dr. Clark A. Pomerleau, March 13, 2021; Joseph Locke and Ben Wright, eds. *The American Yawp: A Massively Collaborative Open U.S. History Textbook* (2020-2021), <https://www.americanyawp.com/>. *The American Yawp* benefits from forty editorial advisors whose expertise runs the gamut from the U.S. South to the U.S. West, women’s history, Black history, racial and ethnic history and many of whom have won national awards for their work.

supplemental Reader, and at the chairperson's behest, Director of Undergraduate Studies Dr. Wesley Phelps created an entirely new reader. A U.S. historian focusing on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender histories, Dr. Phelps graciously answered my questionnaire and described the process of creating the supplemental reader thusly:

I decided to create a primary document reader that would include the voices of people I believed had been neglected in most textbooks. I also asked faculty members to suggest primary documents that coincided with their areas of expertise. And above all, I wanted to keep the cost as low as possible for students. The result, while of course not perfect, more closely represents the diversity of U.S. history than the previous reader and reflects the particular strengths of our department.⁹

The creation and continued updating of such a supplemental text are vitally important to the deconstruction of the master narrative. However, the Readers is too new to evaluate. Therefore, what follows is an analysis strictly based of the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks *Exploring American Histories* volumes 1 and 2. Despite the variety of textbooks used by public universities in Texas and across the country, Hewitt and Lawson presents history in ways that are standard for introductory college history textbooks.¹⁰ Future projects could include a larger sample from other public universities in the state of Texas and possibly throughout the United States, including the strengths and weaknesses of the open access *American Yawp* for course adoption.

Throughout this project, I have spent an immense amount of time contemplating institutional responsibility. To what extent are institutions of higher learning, like the University of North Texas, responsible for the information disseminated in state mandated courses? These courses are required for all degree seeking undergraduate students. However, students are responsible for paying for the course and purchasing the applicable materials and textbooks. These textbooks are expensive, costing between \$35 and \$75, depending on the necessity for a

⁹ Dr. Wesley Phelps, email to author, March 3, 2021.

¹⁰ Personal conversation with major advisor, Dr. Clark A. Pomerleau, March 13, 2021.

code so they may access required homework or materials online. Prices of supplemental texts vary by edition and condition. Some are free online, but all together students could potentially spend close to or over \$100 for course materials. These materials serve as the foundation for class and out-of-class learning and reference. Regardless of price or graduation requirement, universities have a fiduciary responsibility to their students to cultivate courses that challenge their worldview and develop their critical thinking skills. The selection of readings often lies with the individual instructors. Since the University of North Texas has moved to requiring the same textbook, it should provide the foundation that encourage professors to include subaltern histories and narratives.

History education serves as a "reference point for adapting the ways in which individuals and societies perceive the future."¹¹ Cultivating an understanding of United States history helps students understand the sociopolitical repercussions of the past and how those actions and decisions still affect their lives. Currently, United States history courses and textbooks are created around the concept of American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism is the ideology that "presumes...the United States embodies the best and most advanced stage of Western civilization and, therefore, human history to date."¹² These beliefs construct and perpetuate a false narrative of American moral superiority that does not accurately reflect the historical record by extolling historical figures and events while ignoring inhumane acts and practices.¹³ Colonialism, coloniality, imperialism, capitalism, and control over the master

¹¹ Orhan Akinoglu, "Functions of History Education: History Teacher Trainees' Perspective." *Education* 129, no. (2009): 459–66.

¹² Natsu Taylor Saito, *Meeting the Enemy American Exceptionalism and International Law* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2010)

¹³ Throughout this paper, the term "American" refers to citizens or residents of the United States of America, unless otherwise specified.

narratives of life and death have played much larger roles in constructing and maintaining the myth of the United States than mainstream history textbooks admit. This paper investigates propaganda supporting American exceptionalism within modern history textbooks and their influence and perpetuation of the heroification of historical figures.

The first and second volumes of *Exploring American Histories* set the foundation for the University of North Texas' required introductory courses in United States history. It is impossible for any history textbooks to include every nuanced detail of the past 243 years, and authors have to make educated decisions on what events, persons, and themes are included in the final textbook. However, after careful analysis of the aforementioned textbooks, I recommend interventions based on critical race theory and decolonialism to improve how colleges introduce our students to U.S. history in a more holistic manner. Our students deserve a foundation that not only questions the master narrative as critical race theory calls for, but includes diverse individuals, events, and themes that will help them better understand not only the history of this country, but also current events and their own life experiences. For textbooks to include discussions on basic feminist intersectional theory and introduce concepts like necropolitics in a manner digestible for students at the beginning of their higher education will require a mass overhaul of the textbooks and cultural beliefs surrounding the history on the United States.

This project connects theory and praxis in U.S. history education. My experience tutoring for the athletics department and the Texas Academy of Mathematics and Science piqued my interest in these textbooks as my students often came to our sessions asking for explanations unavailable in the textbooks. The vast majority of my students come from minority populations and did not see their histories represented. Their frustration was palpable, their lived experiences and that of their communities are being ignored. They found the subject boring, one even saying

“Miss, why should I care about what a bunch of dead old white men did? They don’t affect me.”

While the sentiment is clearly understood, what our students are failing to understand is that the actions of these “dead old white men” are intrinsically tied to the formation and creation of this country and our collective culture.

Scholars have written about the deficiencies in textbooks for years, and while there has been progress, the textbooks surveyed for this project are still insufficient. There is a liminal space between the epistemological development of U.S. history and classroom praxis. This project highlights the pervasive issues within textbooks by using specific examples that are widely applicable to the historical narrative and provide an option for systemic change.¹⁴ The goal of this project is to highlight that theory can be incorporated into textbooks in a digestible manner for undergraduate students and help students develop critical thinking, observation, and reasoning skills. The chapters provided in this project consider individuals, events, and themes. First, I focus on three figures from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries to illustrate the problem of heroification: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ronald Reagan. The next chapter argues for the inclusion of three events that are either overlooked or underrepresented: the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the 1954 Coup d’état in Guatemala, and the 1985 Bombing of Powelton Village, Philadelphia. Finally, I undertake an analysis of the thematic inclusion of gender, race, and sexuality. Each of these individuals, events, and themes are integral to the conception and perpetuation of American exceptionalism and supremacy, and the introduction of a counter narrative is essential to the destruction of the collective colonial mindset.

The decolonization of the American psyche is imperative. Many Americans already

¹⁴ I am not asserting that this project claims to offer the only answer for the issues raised. However, these ideas are one way in which authors can combat these deficiencies.

believe that we live in a post-racial society. Many claim that they “don’t see color” or claim that or that “focusing on race is what divides us.”¹⁵ The inability to acknowledge racial prejudice within at the macro, meso, or micro level does not mean that systemic and widespread racial prejudice and injustice will simply slip away into the shadow of historical memory. In fact, refusing to acknowledge the serious issues that racism causes in this country only further perpetuates the cycle of violence and oppression. The purpose of historical decolonization is to highlight these systems of oppression and draw parallels to the current violence and destruction of Black¹⁶ and brown bodies.

Instructors approaches the same course with their unique experiences, specialty, and teaching philosophy. Ultimately, these instructors will decide how to teach their courses and which events, individuals, and themes to include. There is an immense onus placed on each professor to ensure that their students leave their classroom with a foundational knowledge of American history. For the purposes of this project, it is not possible to consider individual instructor’s survey requirements and teaching practices. Some may deftly decolonize U.S. history, but what are the main required tools they have to work with? Due to these constrains I have focused my analysis, critique, and suggestions to the first and second volume of *Exploring American Histories*. The basis of my analysis takes issue with the progressive linear timeline, American exceptionalism, and the lack of subaltern representation. My goal is to create criteria for textbooks, which include subaltern histories not just alongside their Eurocentric counterparts, but in such a way that exposes the intersectional nature of those relationships. Women, people of

¹⁵ Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2020), 77.

¹⁶ I use the specific term “Black” with an uppercase “B” because there are many individuals and communities within the United States who are not included under the term African American and this project includes all individuals who define their ethnicity as Black, but not necessarily African American.

color, subaltern sexualities, and other minorities exist within the master narrative of American history, and they deserve comprehensive representation within our required textbooks. To return to my students, they deserve to be represented within the master narrative of the history of the United States.

The history of the United States remains heavily colonized despite recent efforts to create history textbooks and curriculum that makes space for subaltern histories. A colonized master narrative is the process of recounting history that omits systemic and institutional oppression and injustice. Omission comes in many forms, it can be the reduction of details from an event, the inclusion of only a singular individual or community, including details that serve to increase the esteem of certain individuals or communities, or the outright oversight of an entire event, communities, individuals, or themes. The current master narrative of United States history serves to uphold the ideals of American exceptionalism, or the ideas that the United States is at the forefront of innovation and human rights, and so has a responsibility to set an example for the rest of the world. The assertion that the United States is somehow better than its contemporaries is bolstered by the overwhelming belief in individual responsibility, republicanism, and high levels of religiosity.¹⁷ The master narrative within the textbooks analyzed for this project uphold these ideals by skimming over controversial topics and highlighting the events and individuals who exude these exceptionalist ideals and traits. A colonized narrative requires the segregation of subaltern histories to minor roles and the elimination of controversies that illuminate the problematic nature of the U.S. history.

There are multiple terms used throughout this project that can have different definitions

¹⁷ Roberto Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism and American Ignorance* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019).

depending on the context in which they are used. The term “*system*” or “*systemic*” refers to the institutional and structural organization of society that perpetuated inequality and oppression towards individuals outside of the dominate group, it “exists at the level of institutions (harmful policies and practices) and across structures (education, health, transportation, economy, etc.) that are interconnected and reinforcing over time.”¹⁸ *Institutional racism* is a system which “relie[s] on anti-black attitudes of inferiority, even if individual whites did not themselves discriminate against individual blacks.”¹⁹ *Systemic oppression* is the institutional and structural organization of society that perpetuated inequality and oppression towards individuals outside of the dominate group, it has “historical antecedents [and] is the intentional disadvantaging of groups of people based on their identity while advantaging members of the dominant group (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, language, etc.).”²⁰ *Institutional oppression* is the “policies and practices at the organizational level that perpetuate oppression.”²¹ This can include government policies, societal customs, traditions, or practices that create or produce unequal treatment, specifically stratified on gender, sex, or racial lines. *Structural oppression* is the interaction and accumulation of policies, customs, traditions, or practices across institutions and history.²² Additionally, when terms such as “refuse,” “unable,” or other seemingly inflammatory diction is used, my intention is not a personal attack on specific authors, historians, or educators. These terms are applied to a broad spectrum and encompass the system of American history

¹⁸ “Lens of Systemic Oppression.” National Equity Project, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression>.

¹⁹ Coretta Phillips, “Institutional Racism and Ethnic Inequalities: An Expanded Multilevel Framework.” *Journal of Social Policy* 40, no. 1 (2011): 173.

²⁰ “Lens of Systemic Oppression.” National Equity Project.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

education and is not applied to individuals unless otherwise specified.

One of the initial signs of a colonized master narrative is the absence of discussion about systemic, structural, and/or institutional oppression. There are multiple intersectional systems of oppression, injustice, and intolerance that were put in place to justify the unethical and immoral ways in which this country was physically and metaphorically built.²³ When history or civics textbooks ignore these systems it can be challenging for students to connect past events to modern experiences. The past, even pre-colonial America has a relationship with modern events. In order for our students to be accurately informed and be equipped with the tools to critically understand their reality, they must learn the history of the United States as it was, not as we wish it was.

1.3 Theory and Methodology

As noted, the textbooks required for all sections of the mandatory U.S. history survey. At the University of North Texas, all students must take two entry-level United States history courses. The textbooks required for these courses at the University of North Texas are the main source for evaluation for this project. The theory of decoloniality, critical race theory, necropolitics, and intersectional feminist theory. Through a textual analysis I will be building off of formative works of decoloniality, critical race, necropolitics, and intersectional feminism. Each are crucial tools to dismantle the ideology of American exceptionalism that has played a pivotal role in the construction of the United States.

These theories will allow the deconstruction and reorientation of events, themes, and individuals within the historical master narrative. The method of applying the theories through a

²³ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: the Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2017), 19.

chronological textual analysis will facilitate the exposure and removal of myth-like master narratives by viewing these events through nontraditional theoretical frames. It is not enough to remove the false master narrative from the text. Textbook authors have a responsibility to highlight the counter-narratives that bring attention to these individuals' problematic nature and the histories of minorities that are traditionally excluded.

Decoloniality is an epistemological approach that refers to the disentanglement of Eurocentric ideals, histories, and thoughts from those of the traditionally oppressed and underrepresented.²⁴ As defined by Aníbal Quijano, coloniality “is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn't exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples.”²⁵ Gone are the visible shackles of British Imperial rule but the consequences of such aggressive and long-term domination are still palpable today. Racial discrimination and hierarchy are one of the continued expressions of coloniality that underscores every aspect of the U.S. sociocultural experience. Students are inadvertently socialized to assume the totality of European supremacy, which thus perpetuates the cycle of coloniality.²⁶ María Lugones stated that “judging the colonized for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilizing mission justified [and continues to justify] enormous cruelty.”²⁷ Decolonization is vitally important to the continuation of historical study and teaching if the goal is to disseminate knowledge and histories rooted in truth, no matter how uncomfortable it may be to confront. The process of

²⁴ Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, in Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 32 (2000): 533–80.

²⁵ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁷ Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25, no. 4, 744.

colonialization and coloniality requires “a violent concentration of world resources under the control and for the benefit of a small European minority – and above all, of its ruling class.”²⁸ In the case of United States history, the concentration of resources is the perpetuation of the erroneous and mythologically based master narrative, which has traditionally perpetuated white supremacy and hegemony.

The decolonization of our history textbooks is antithetical to the myth of American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism thrives on the idea that the history of the United States is rooted in progress. Eurocentric ideals called for the destruction of non-European societies and practices as an inevitable part of the progression.²⁹ While we may admit to the murder and enslavement of Indigenous Americans and Africans hundreds of years ago, our textbooks fail to illustrate the continued consequences those communities endure. Colonization is not a past event to be looked back on with regret; it is a structured and pervasive mindset.³⁰ The eradication of this structure requires confrontation.

Decoloniality also exposes the myths of American exceptionalism and "American Dream."³¹ The public school system teaches students that everyone born in the United States has the same access to opportunities and resources regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The assumption that hard work and determination will allow anyone to rise above systemic oppression to achieve financial success constitutes the route to the "American Dream." Both myths undermine genuine efforts to name and reform serious systemic issues within the United States. The myth of American exceptionalism and the "American

²⁸ Quijano, “Coloniality,” 168.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lugones, “Towards a Decolonial Feminism,” 748.

³¹ “The American Dream.” *Merriam-Webster* online. Accessed March 12, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/the%20American%20dream>.

Dream" serve "to obscure the source of [the ruling classes] opulent wealth."³² The refusal to acknowledge role ubiquitous historical figures played in structural and institutional oppression has led to the heroification of historical figures and the muting of their role in leading oppressive systems within the master narrative.

Within the context of critical race theory, the purpose of a counter-narrative is to “challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems.”³³ Counter-narratives “interrogat[e] and deconstruct master narratives... [which] expos[e] indoctrination”.³⁴ The deconstruction of the master narrative is essential to the decolonization of American history. Deconstruction of colonization does not require the destruction of the master narrative. It requires a willingness to probe past the erroneous concept of a post-racial society and encounter the challenging truths that complicate and deviate from the master narrative.³⁵ American history education must continue to expand the master narrative, and our students will be more informed and better understand their world.

Currently, the master narrative of American history focuses on a set of individuals, events, and themes that have traditionally been accepted as the most important in the nation's history. These individuals are usually white, upper-class men credited with the conception, construction, and maintenance of the United States. While it would be incorrect to assert that traditionally important historical figures and events have not influenced the United States, they

³² Roberto Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism and American Ignorance* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019), 107.

³³ Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara J Yosso. "Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-Storytelling." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 4, no. 14 (2001): 475.

³⁴ Margaret Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 124.

³⁵ Ibid.

are typically afforded more credit than is appropriate. The events included within Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks overlook racially motivated violence while highlighting American supremacy through Wars and other acts of domineering violence. Specific events left out portray a version of American history experienced by subaltern individuals and groups that create a controversial counter narrative. Finally, a thematic analysis of race, gender, and sexuality reveals the heteronormative, whitewashed, and male centric nature of these texts. People of color, women, and queer communities and individuals are often only included as an afterthought or excluded all together. The inclusion of counter narrative aims to reevaluate and redistribute the master narrative and create an accurate representation of the past, and hopefully, offer a new perception of the future.³⁶

Critical race theorists contend that the historical master narrative is used to tell the dominant group's stories and histories.³⁷ In the United States, this group mainly consists of white men with European ancestry. The issue with an exclusionary master narrative is that it fails to represent the subaltern groups that have always existed the United States. These people have actively contributed and produced incredible wisdom and knowledge that has long been overlooked by traditional scholars of American history. The colonization of knowledge has led to a belief that the only truly valuable knowledge comes from white, western people (usually men). This country's history is so much more than the history of founding fathers, world wars, or scientific discoveries. This is a nation of diverse peoples with important stories and knowledge.

Critical race theory recognizes that racism is systemic and entrenched in the United States' historical, cultural, and social makeup. Using this theory as a lens through which to view

³⁶ Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory*, 2011.

³⁷ Ibid.

required courses and their accompanying textbooks, it is clear that the racial and social hierarchies on which America was founded are still utilized and perpetuated in modern history textbooks.³⁸ This does not mean that authors always include these hierarchies and stereotypes on purpose in modern depictions of historical events. Many of these structures are implicit, unintentional, and socially accepted. We must address deeply ingrained systemic and structural oppression in classrooms and textbooks if we truly aspire to achieve and live in a truly decolonial society.³⁹

While the traditional definition of critical race theory refers to the concept of race and racism, it has adapted over the years to include the intersection of class and gender.⁴⁰ Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 20th century. Born from the concept of critical race theory, intersectionality refers to the idea that oppression is a multifaceted experienced. In an interview with Vox, Crenshaw reiterated, "intersectionality was a prism to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren't [sic] being appreciated by the courts."⁴¹ Originally, intersectionality highlighted how law denied Black women justice by separating their identities into that of either women or African Americans rather than recognizing that they faced discrimination based on their combined gender and race.⁴² The term has since expanded to encompass all marginalized identities. The theory of intersectionality asserts that there are multitudes of overlapping and interconnected labels and experiences that

³⁸ Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory*, 124.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Solorzano and Yosso, "Critical Race and LatCrit Theory", 471–95.

⁴¹ Jane Coaston, "The Intersectionality Wars," *Vox* online. May 20, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>.

⁴² Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991).

influence the way society sees an individual or a group. This expanded theory of intersectionality can help students better understand the social and historical context that has allowed bias and system oppression to proliferate throughout American history. For students to better understand and conceptualize their experience globally, intersectionality must exist in the required history textbooks.

A basic understanding of intersectional oppression will help students understand systemic issues in the United States, such as police violence in Black America. Neither textbook surveyed for this project mention the formation of the police, nor any information about how its formation was steeped in racism, historically or in modern terms. The police are a direct extension of the sovereign power and embody the necropolitical power exerted over minorities. Achilles Mbembe describes necropolitics as "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die."⁴³ The traditional definition of necropolitics refers to the present expression of sovereignty and power. Historical necropolitics incorporates the way histories and stories are recorded and told and how they present those denoted. Master narratives hold necropolitical power and control over the life and death of historical figures, groups, and events. It serves the dominant group to maintain a teleological version of historical progress. Control over the historical narrative is vitally important for the indoctrination of American exceptionalism. The history textbooks required by the University of North Texas utilize historical necropolitics by the omissions and oversights in the text that perpetuate the ideals of American exceptionalism. Historical necropolitics does not require malintent. The same issues have existed within United States history for centuries. The ability to control the way the story of life and death is conveyed is another expression of power.

⁴³ Achilles Mbembe, "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

The sovereign power dictates how the death of individuals or society is remembered; they have necropolitical power over the dead and historical memory.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM OF HEROIFICATION: GEORGE WASHINGTON, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND RONALD REAGAN

2.1 Introduction

James Loewen describes heroification as a "degenerative process...that makes people over into heroes... turn[ing] flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest."⁴⁴ Blind acceptance and adherence to the master narrative dilute opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, reasoning, and observation skills.⁴⁵ Without the latitude to "embrace uncertainty...much of what passes for thinking is actually rationalizing a reason to continue believing what is customary."⁴⁶ The current way we teach United States history perpetuates a false narrative of American moral superiority that deeply influences national identity. History is ripe with contradiction and controversy. Without the ability to acknowledge that different people have different interpretations of the same individual or event, the master narrative of American history will only speak for the dominant group. The deconstruction of the master narrative surrounding culturally significant individuals inspires the creation of a counter narrative.⁴⁷ This incorporates a holistic understanding of these important figures and a reorientation of their significance in the history of the United States. The expansion of the master narrative to include the marginalized voices will complicate the traditionally accepted view of American history. This complication will undoubtedly create a level of discomfort that many American's have never experienced.

⁴⁴ James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything American History Textbooks Get Wrong* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2019), 52.

⁴⁵ Timothy Messer-Kruse, *Ethnic Studies: Critical Fundamentals* (Toledo, OH: Achromous Books, 2018), 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory*, 124.

2.2 Heroification

American history and history textbooks are full of hero-worship, the veneration of a historical individual to a scale surpassing factual reality. Hero status has allowed many to escape the sins of their past and has catapulted them into the historical canon. The position of president of the United States has long been considered one of the most important in the world. The president is often referred to as “the leader of the free world” and the United States as the role model for democracy around the world. These factors highlight the importance of exploring the personal histories of specific presidents. The president is often a role model for the American people and arguably is considered the most important American during their tenure. The president is responsible for the way in which the United States is perceived globally.⁴⁸ It is because of these reasons that investigating the roles they performed within the history of the United States is vitally important to the decolonization of American history.

Textbooks glorify historical presidents like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ronald Reagan, and popular media has created a cult of personality around their memory. The historical narrative focuses on their great accomplishments and shies away from the realities of their racist practices and how they wielded power to the detriment of vulnerable Americans. Heroification is dangerous. Allowing individuals to reach mythic status without the ability to reconcile their flaws opens a one-way path for veneration with no room for criticism or historical growth. Conversely, heroification creates a structure that ties a national identity to such individuals. Politicizing criticism and stunting a nation's ability to learn from past mistakes. The inability to grow or adapt the historical record based on new or previously unutilized information

⁴⁸ Steven S. Skiena and Charles Ward. *Who's Bigger?: Where Historical Figures Really Rank* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

highlights the stronghold American exceptionalism expresses over the master narrative.

Heroification is a form of historical colonization and an expression of necropolitical power.⁴⁹ Our textbooks hesitate to depict American heroes negatively. To contextualize fully these great men's racist and ethnocentric behavior, beliefs, and actions in our history textbooks incites massive controversy. Historical apologists will claim that evaluating historical figures based on modern morals is problematic. However, the process of decolonization requires coming to terms with the past. The master narrative does not make space for controversies or counter-narratives. This is deeply problematic; the history of the United States is the history of pervasive controversy, violence, and the denial of basic human rights. To demystify our heroes and correctly contextualize their actions and roles in the formation of American history, scholars and educators have a responsibility to include the uncomfortable truths about our national heroes.

The dismantlement of historical heroification bleeds over into our current conception of political figures. Many former and current political figures are unnecessarily idolized. Perpetuated by popular and social media, many political figures have capitalized on this fame and created a divisive political atmosphere within the country. If textbooks, curriculum, and courses devote time and resources to the de-heroification of historical figures, students will have the knowledge actively to apply those same concepts to current political figures. The decolonization of the past disseminates the decolonization of the present and the future.

2.3 George Washington's Quiet Controversy

The textbook portrays Washington as the victorious general of the French and Indian war, the strategic leader who lead a rag-tag group of volunteer soldiers to victory against the greatest

⁴⁹ Achilles Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 2003.

military power in the world, and the first president of the newly formed United States of America.⁵⁰ These characteristics may be applicable to Washington, but the textbooks make only a brief mention of Washington's status as the owner of human chattel.⁵¹ While it may seem like an insignificant part of his back story, his status as a enslaver is antithetical to the founding American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Roberto Sirvent highlights in his book *American Exceptionalism and American Innocence* that the myths surrounding the origin of the United States "provides a framework for social change in America where the redemptive promise of the American nation-state is the ideal goal for future reform projects."⁵² In short, ignoring this detail of Washington's backstory sets a precedent for ignoring the prominent issues created by the historical subjugation of Black individuals in the United States. Thus, as scholars, educators, and authors of American history, we have a responsibility to our students to contextualize American heroes accurately, including the unsavory aspects that we may wish to forget.

Enslaved labor was fundamental to Washington's status and success. He inherited enslaved people as a child along with his father's plantation and enslaved people as an adult. Washington's marriage contributed a dowry of 84 enslaved people to what would ultimately be more than 500 people working Mount Vernon's lands under coercion.⁵³ The use of enslaved labor was integral to Washington's ability to leave his home for months on end. Martha Washington and a cousin of George Washington oversaw the free labor provided by enslaved

⁵⁰ Nancy A. Hewitt and Steven F. Lawson. *Exploring American Histories: a Survey with Sources* (2. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, Macmillan Learning, 2019), 142.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism*, 67.

⁵³ "George Washington's Life." George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed November 14th 2020, <https://www.mountvernon.org/GeorgeWashington/biography/>.

Africans while Washington spent "the summer of 1775... work[ing] to forge a disciplined army" or "the winter of 1775-1776... secur[ing] important victories [for the] Continental Army."⁵⁴ His ability to achieve the status required that he serve in prior military positions, and ultimately the military and governmental positions made him famous. Therefore, the context of his position ought to be included in the required readings in undergraduate history courses. This country was built on the free labor of enslaved Africans, and this is illustrated in Washington's life.⁵⁵ His economic and social status was contingent on uncompensated labor. It may be difficult for some to accept that the nation's founders perpetrated such heinous acts against others. However, the website dedicated to the preservation of Washington's Virginia home and legacy openly admits to the president's violence against his enslaved workforce. Although, it does its best to downplay the violence and seeks to portray Washington as a benevolent enslaver, who only used violence when no other form of punishment succeeded.⁵⁶

George Washington is an important historical figure in the history of the United States. Without his participation in the Revolutionary War, there is no doubt that the United States may well have been a drastically different nation than it is today. It is important to acknowledge Washington's contributions to the United States' founding, in terms of both political systems and the continuation of slavery. Based on the critical race theories concept of counter-narratives, Washington's history ought to provide a deep dive into his status as the owner of human chattel. The required reading fails to acknowledge Washington's cruelty as an owner of enslaved people. According to Timothy Messer-Kruse's textbook, *Ethnic Studies: Critical Fundamentals*,

⁵⁴ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 179.

⁵⁵ Edward E. Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016).

⁵⁶ "Resistance and Punishment." George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed November 14, 2020 <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/resistance-and-punishment/>.

Washington was as violent as any other enslaver. While Hewitt and Lawson's version of Washington's life only mentions his status as the owner of human chattel a single time,⁵⁷ Messer-Kruse argues that his status as an enslaver was critical to his ability to be a general and president.⁵⁸ He actively pursued runaway slaves, separated families, and violently punished disobedience. Washington's status as the owner of enslaved people cannot be separated from his status as an American hero. His history is full of contradictions and beliefs that are antithetical to the founding principles of the United States. The inclusion of this type of information in the required textbooks introduces a difficult discussion about the intersection of American values and the conception of the United States.

The dismantling of heroification requires the addition of controversy and human interest.⁵⁹ Washington has a vested interest that required the use of enslaved labor. The addition of this information creates a multidimensional view of a real human being and helps lay to rest the heroic image of a man who did not truly exist. The recognition that one of the most famous leaders of the United States was a complex and inherently flawed person opens up an alternate dialogue that makes space for further uncomfortable histories. This creates a space for decolonization and necropolitics within our textbooks. The destruction of heroification allows historical figures to be acknowledged without their mythical status interfering with historical analysis. This new perspective on Washington as an individual, soldier, and politician creates a counter-narrative that decolonizes aspects of founding history that have been under-recognized and omitted within the pages of Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks. Washington's status as an enslaver is an example of the intersecting oppressions still faced by Black Americans to date.

⁵⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories* 142.

⁵⁸ Messer-Kruse, *Ethnic Studies*, 132.

⁵⁹ Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 52.

The heroification of George Washington is an example of the textbook's tendency to skim over controversial topics that deserve representation. It is also yet another example of the necropolitical power that history education holds over not just the death of historical individuals but also their lives.

Like Washington, countless other figures shaped the United States as a country but privately did not subscribe to the founding ideas of liberty and justice for all. This heroification does not only apply to presidents or other elected officials. Any historical individual can fall victim to heroification. Heroification leads to the destruction of historical fact and ultimately creates a heavily colonized historical narrative.⁶⁰ Removing the person who inhabited the hero and reducing their life to that of only a few specific events and actions. This view of historical figures serves to distract from the real-life issues of morality and injustice. This distraction from reality serves several purposes. First, it creates an idealized image of American history that justifies "the dominant narrative of the... American story as one of freedom overcoming slavery rather than freedom rooted in slavery."⁶¹ It creates a distorted view of the past, one that does not require interpretation or questioning.⁶² One that does not allow for the development of critical thinking, reasoning, or observation skills. This blind heroification teaches students to accept accounts of these important historical figures at face value without ever broaching the topic of their humanity. Second, it creates a one-dimensional and pious representation of complicated people and fosters the same unquestioned belief in the inherent good of their modern counterparts. Furthermore, it asserts that "the most effective way to judge a society is by its

⁶⁰ Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 52.

⁶¹ Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism*, 68.

⁶² Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 52.

rhetoric rather than its actions."⁶³ Washington and his fellow founding fathers may have espoused the values of freedom and liberty, but they did so while violently exploiting Black lives.

It is vitally important that our textbooks include and highlight a counter-narrative that depicts the real-life experiences of these important historical figures. The introduction of a counter narrative does not require the destruction of these individuals' important contributions towards the conception and continuation of the United States. However, it allows students to accurately contextualize the past and understand how they contributed to real systemic change and the continuation of the status quo. The purpose of history education is to help students better understand their present and future. A general understanding of George Washington's political life does not allow for a holistic understanding of the man behind the famous general and president. He was an inherently flawed person, which does not mean he was not integral to the United States' founding. However, it does mean that he should be remembered and taught so that students have the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about his historical significance.

2.4 Abraham Lincoln: The Great Emancipator?

Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States of America and has become deified in the textbook canon similarly to that of Washington. Usually credited with the emancipation of the enslaved in America, American histories glorify Lincoln as a hero of and for the oppressed. Popularly associated with the misnomer "the great emancipator," Lincoln, in reality, focused on saving the Union.⁶⁴ Taking a position sympathetic to ending slavery was a

⁶³ Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 25

⁶⁴ David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Struggle for Freedom in the Civil War Era* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23.

necessity to keep the Union army stocked with soldiers and keep the British allies of the U.S. federal government based on Britain's rejections of slavery.⁶⁵ The Civil War remains the deadliest war in American history, and by 1862, the Union was desperate for soldiers. Knowing "that blacks [sic] would only fight for liberty [,]" the Union begrudgingly allowed their enlistment.⁶⁶ These facts directly contradict the concept of Lincoln as a champion for the end of institutional slavery.

While the textbook acknowledges that the south seceded from the Union because they feared Lincoln's presidency would end slavery, it fails to articulate clearly Lincoln's true intention.⁶⁷ Lincoln repeatedly said in private and notably, in public that he would do whatever it took to save the Union, whether that meant freeing all the slaves, none, or only some.⁶⁸ This narrative has been overlooked in the textbooks. Although mentioned several times, the textbooks fail to illustrate the significance of Lincoln's position on slavery, emancipation, and abolition. It is not only Lincoln's intentions behind emancipation that are underrepresented; there are myriad examples in these textbooks that are outside the scope of this paper that ignore or diminish serious historical issues within the context they are presented. History education must do more than present facts, timelines, and personal narratives of heroic men.

This textbook may not explicitly uphold the trope of the "great emancipator," but the omission of Lincoln's true intentions and power actually to free people obscures historical accuracy and memory. Southern states formed a Confederacy and seceded explicitly to retain slavery from their perception that it was under threat. Union policy, however, was ambivalent to

⁶⁵ Williams, *I Freed Myself*, 25.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 423.

⁶⁸ Williams, *I Freed Myself*, 23.

the voices of the enslaved until the Union critically needed their labor. The myth of the great emancipator has persisted for centuries, wormed its way into our history books, popular media, and politics. Enslaved people pressured the Union into adopting abolition as one of the consequences of the war.⁶⁹ Lincoln as a proclaimer of freedom for those not under Union control disregards the work of enslaved people who risked their lives to free themselves and their families and the work of Black individuals who pressured the Union military to admit them as soldiers and laborers. Attributing freedom to Lincoln is an example of the colonization of historical memory. To omit the self-emancipation efforts of the enslaved and reassign that work and the intersecting oppressions to individuals, like Lincoln, who held immense political influence redistributes power and agency. When it was Lincoln who needed Black participation in the army to save the United States, this title and concept's indirect support reinforces the belief in teleological history and a progressive historical narrative.

Notably, textbooks gloss over the international pressures that forced the issue of emancipation. While the United States and England had enjoyed almost half a century of peace following the War of 1812, the Civil War threatened the international cotton trade.⁷⁰ It was only when England was on the verge of entering the war allied with the Confederacy that Lincoln and the Republican party introduced the Emancipation Proclamation.⁷¹ If England entered the Civil War, it would have developed into an incident that would have well surpassed the borders of the United States. The Emancipation Proclamation is not the document that abolished slavery. The proclamation's rhetoric specifically asserts that only states that were in rebellion with the Union

⁶⁹ Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: the Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 139.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Howard, *Union in Peril*, 139.

were subject to emancipation. Slaveholding states that were not part of the Confederacy were exempt from the proclamation. While the textbook briefly mentions this, it fundamentally fails to address the significance of the omitted states, highlighting that Lincoln's only priority was to preserve the Union.⁷² Emancipation was a mere consequence of the incredibly high death toll and England's possible entrance into the conflict in support of the Confederacy.

Notably, the textbook fails fully to detail the specific circumstances surrounding the abolition of slavery. The book claims that the Thirteenth Amendment "prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude anywhere in the United States."⁷³ While this is partially true, the full text reads, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."⁷⁴ The textbook leaves out a fundamental portion of the Thirteenth Amendment, consequently, the part that is responsible for the overpopulation of prisons in the United States. This is yet another example of pervasive omission throughout textbooks. The second half of the Thirteenth Amendment is essential to the prison industrial complex, a serious issue that affects every person living in the United States. The authors had a very clear opportunity to include the amendment's full text but stopped short of including the uncomfortable language. Slavery is legal in the United States; it is just under different circumstances than before. Slavery, "if viewed not just as an economic arrangement but as a form of domination—is not of the *past*; it lives on today" (emphasis original).⁷⁵ Constructed oppression is visible and omnipresent throughout modern American society and culture.

⁷² Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 432.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁷⁴ U.S. Const. amend. XIII. Sec. 1.

⁷⁵ Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism*, 72.

One must only observe American society and culture through the framework of intersectionality to see the overlapping oppressions levied against Black and brown bodies. Black empowerment movements are often misunderstood by individuals who either have received an inadequate history education or are unwilling to accept their role in the fundamental oppression of people of color.⁷⁶ If introductory American history courses included discussions on race and systemic racism, the work of decolonization would begin at the root of historical colonization. The historical record disseminates colonized knowledge. Without access to counter-narratives and alternative experiences, many students will go on to perpetuate the harmful, misleading, or false narratives. Only when the teaching of controversial and difficult histories becomes the norm will American society move towards a truly post-colonial culture.

In order to decolonize our systems of learning and knowledge, our textbooks must take the first step to acknowledge misinformation, false histories, and common historical misconceptions. Textbooks have a responsibility not only to highlight historical events but to dispel commonly perpetuated lies and oversights that have infiltrated historical memory. When this popular misinformation is ignored and is not deconstructed within the required textbooks, it allows for the proliferation of fallacies in our history education. The deconstruction of historical misconceptions in textbooks will allow for the introduction of appropriate historical context. In turn, this will push students to deconstruct their concept of historical events based on the misinformation they have previously learned. For example, the introduction to the first chapter dedicated to the Civil War should include a section that reviews the popular misconceptions that proliferate throughout United States history education and refute them point by point. The

⁷⁶ Daniel L. Byman, "Who Is a Terrorist, Actually?" *Brookings*, November 10, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/09/22/who-is-a-terrorist-actually/>.

destruction of false narratives makes space for the reconstruction of counter-narratives that include the experiences of minority groups.

2.5 Ronald Reagan and the Consequences of Greed

During the next 116 years, dozens of presidents would make enormous impacts on the history of the United States. World Wars would come and go and progress towards racial equality would slowly gain momentum. However, in the 1980s the presidency of Ronald Reagan would slow or halt much of this progress. Ronald Reagan was the 40th president of the United States; he served in the role from 1981-1989. The textbook does a reasonable job framing Reagan as the conservative crusader who lowered taxes for the wealthy, cut welfare, and exponentially increased the military budget.⁷⁷ It even provides a basic analysis of the consequences of these economic policy changes. However, an intersectional approach to this history requires an in-depth analysis of those affected by Reagan's policies, not a simple acknowledgment that they have a negative impact on poor people. While this section of the textbook dedicates more page space to the plight of the impoverished, and while that is an improvement regarding the other aspects discussed in this project, there is still much to be desired from the authors on the subject

The economic policies of the Reagan era still deeply affect myriad aspects of the American experience.⁷⁸ Not only did he introduce the term "welfare queen," he simultaneously sought to counter New Deal laws and continued 1930s narratives of the deserving poor as

⁷⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 817.

⁷⁸ Bruce Bartlett, *The New American Economy: the Failure of Reaganomics and a New Way Forward* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

white.⁷⁹ Many of these standards were created based on false racialized stereotypes specifically to deny Black Americans access to governmental assistance. Governmental limitations and restrictions to programs like food stamps or housing assistance assert necropolitical power over Black Americans. Recent studies have highlighted that states with a higher percentage of Black residents are less likely to fund "the provision of cash assistance."⁸⁰ In fact, in these states, funds are more likely to be allocated to "encourage the formation of a two-parent families" and "reduce the incidents of out-of-wedlock pregnancies."⁸¹ Insinuating that poverty can be overcome by the heteronormative assumption of what the government considers a "normal" family perpetuates stereotypes that continue the cycle of poverty instead of reducing or eliminating the phenomenon. The restriction or denial of access to these basic necessities subliminally asserts that Black bodies are not as worthy of life as their white counterparts.⁸²

Another major issue with these textbooks is the minute glossaries and general lack of definitions. Specifically, the chapters dedicated to Reagan and his administration capitalized on anti-communist and anti-socialist rhetoric and do not explain what the terms mean. The authors assume that students already know or will independently lookup such terms. This is a strange gamble that could easily be remedied with the addition of basic definitions. Additionally, our textbook insinuates that these terms are inherently negative without providing unbiased definitions or explanations. This is a subtle form of indoctrination. As a capitalist society, it is beneficial to keep these terms vague so that students assume that any alternative to capitalism is

⁷⁹ David Zucchino, *Myth of the Welfare Queen: a Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist's Portrait of Women on the Line* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

⁸⁰ Zach Parolin, "Welfare Money Is Paying for a Lot of Things Besides Welfare." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, August 21, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/through-welfare-states-are-widening-racial-divide/591559/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Zucchino, *Myth of the Welfare Queen*, 1999.

associated with negative events, such as war. Neoliberalism has bolstered capitalism by reducing taxes and promoting the "free market" concept while subsidizing businesses and brokering international deals to privilege U.S. companies.⁸³ Low tax rates require government-funded welfare programs to be cut or ended, since neoliberalism does not cut military spending. This leaves lower socioeconomic classes without access to necessities such as food and housing. The reduction of benefits most affects people of color, women, and other minorities.

Neither volume of either required textbook makes an effort to provide an accurate definition of the term "communism" or "socialism." These are complex economic theories that the media and discourse often misrepresent. Many students will never be required to take any courses related to economic theory; an introductory history course may be their only exposure to these terms in an academic setting. Therefore, it is the responsibility of these courses to ensure that students have a basic understanding of pervasive terminology. This expands past the terms of communism and socialism; however, it may be difficult or impossible to define every such term in the duration of a single course. However, using the example of the misuse of common terms, such as communism and socialism, students will develop the skill required to question terms, concepts, and ideas that were previously not considered.

Communism and socialism are not synonymous terms. Although, if one were only to read the textbooks, it would be difficult to come away with a comprehensive understanding of either term. According to Michael Newman, socialism has three defining characteristics:

The most fundamental characteristic is socialism is its commitment to the creation of an egalitarian society... socialist have maintained that under capitalism, vast privileges and opportunities are derived from the hereditary ownership of capital and wealth at one end of the social scale, while a cycle of deprivation limits opportunities and influence at the other end... a belief in the *possibility* of constructing an alternative egalitarian system

⁸³ Anna Marie Smith, "Neoliberalism, Welfare Policy, and Feminist Theories of Social Justice." *Feminist Theory* 9, no. 2 (2008): 131–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700108090407>.

based on the values of solidarity and cooperation [and] a relatively optimistic view of human beings and their ability to cooperate with one another.⁸⁴

It is important to note that the definition of socialism varies by individual, government, and scholar. However, the basic fundamental tenants of socialism require the belief "that it is possible to make significant changes in the world through conscious human agency."⁸⁵ Both textbooks fail to contextualize and define socialism appropriately. Only briefly mentioned, the textbooks shy away from a direct comparison between the theories of capitalism and socialism. The textbook loosely defines capitalism as "a cooperative commonwealth of capital and labor, with the government acting as an umpire between the two" and socialism as "a revolutionary movement of industrial workers that would control the means of economic production and establish an egalitarian society."⁸⁶ While it may seem trivial, the way textbooks define these theories speaks to how they are accepted in American society. Capitalism is described as a balancing act between the owners of capital and the people who perform their labor, with the government only stepping in where necessary—largely ignoring that the process of wealth accumulation requires the exploitation of workers. Conversely, socialism is described using violent rhetoric such as "revolution" and "control." The word choices subtly affect how readers should view each term.

Similarly, communism is never accurately defined. A thorough examination of the index and the accompanying pages never offers a holistic or partial definition of the term. The basis of the communist philosophy is the concept of class struggle between those who own the means of production and those who work in production. Communism has certainly deviated in practice

⁸⁴ Michael Newman, *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26-27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 540.

from this rather simple concept, and in practice, it has taken many different forms in different governments. The way the textbooks portrays communism assumes that there is only one implementation of the economic and political theory. Not only does the textbook fail to offer a basic definition of the term, but it also fails to identify the particular derivative of communism referenced:

Communist theory is ambiguous, often incomplete, and sometimes overtly contradictory. This is partly because the various theorists were writing at different times about different conditions and in different personal situations... It is partly because they were sometimes interpreting the past, sometimes analysing [sic] the present, sometimes discussing the near-to-medium-term future, and occasionally speculating on the long-term goal of a communist society. In part it is also because, like most theorists, they were not completely consistent throughout their lives. And in part, it is because they were sometimes writing from a more normative perspective (i.e., what should be), at other times from a more descriptive one (i.e., what is).⁸⁷

While it would be outside the textbooks' scope to include an in-depth analysis of the theories of communism, it is the responsibility of the required reading to provide students with basic definitions--specifically if the terms in question are used throughout the text and are relevant throughout history. The only descriptive terminology associated with the word communism is when it is put into relation with capitalism, and it is described as "a doctrine hostile to free market individualism."⁸⁸ Again, note the use of vocabulary in this example. An undefined term used only in a negative context will only allow students to form a negative association with the word. The purpose of history textbooks is not to indoctrinate students with a specific ideology or belief system; it is to highlight and display facts and evidence in such a way that allows students to draw their own conclusions.

This is yet another example of the colonization of language represented within these

⁸⁷ Leslie Holmes, *Communism: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15.

⁸⁸ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 817.

textbooks. Textbooks and their authors have a fiduciary responsibility to their readers to present concepts and facts without warping bias. Texts should define terms in the main text and the glossary, so students have easy access to accurate and unbiased information. The theories of socialism and communism have a negative connotation in the United States because it is a nation that considers unfettered capitalism to be the only economic theory of value. This ideal has a long history in the United States but an immense turning point in the 1980s during the Reagan administration.

Furthermore, the textbook does not offer a distinct definition of the economic theory of capitalism. The concept of laissez-faire is briefly discussed and defined as a theory in which the market will have "the greatest economic success if the government let[s] individuals pursue their own self-interest unhindered by outside and artificial influences."⁸⁹ These are the basic tenants of capitalism, the economic system on which the world functions today. No political policy has exemplified these traits more than Reagan's policy of "trickle-down economics."⁹⁰ The concept of trickle-down economics only served to highlight further Lugones' assertion about the distribution of blame within a hierarchical class system. Our government and society blame the impoverished for their inability to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" while completely disregarding that these economic policies destroyed any scrap of metaphorical bootstrap they may have had in the past. Reagan's administration gutted the middle class, welfare, and social programs and blamed those affected by those changes for their fall in socioeconomic status. Simply stating what Reaganomics did within the historical context of the era disregards the compounding and intersecting damage these policies created. Despite what some politicians

⁸⁹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 537-538.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 963.

claim, a healthy economy does not reflect the overall financial health or stability of a nation.

It was during this time of supposed economic prosperity that the United States saw commencement of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the rise of Christian nationalism. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a classic example of necropolitical power wielded by the government over minorities. During this time, HIV/AIDS was typically associated with gay men and drug users and disproportionately affected Black communities across the United States. Two minority populations who were not widely respected by the public at large. The Reagan administration was heavily supported by a conservative base of Christian nationals who "felt threatened by more tolerant views of homosexuality."⁹¹ It was beneficial to Reagan's administration and his reelection campaign to ignore the crisis and treat it as an issue of morality as opposed to that of public health. The government refused to acknowledge the severity of HIV/AIDS until years after the disease arrived in the United States, and tens of thousands of people had died. This is a classic example and expression of necropolitics. By ignoring the outbreak of one of the deadliest diseases in the world, the government was able to dictate, by omission, the way in which a seemingly undesirable faction of people was exterminated.

Decolonizing history education requires the demystification of alternate economic theories by exposing colonialism and capitalism's harmful effects. In order for students to understand better how their country maintains such a stratified social and economic hierarchy, textbooks must offer a holistic and comprehensive explanation of the development and maintenance of colonialism and capitalism. These concepts maintain a symbiotic relationship. Capitalism is one of the driving forces of modern colonialism. To be considered successful in the United States, one must accumulate capital, control access to resources, and make high-profit

⁹¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 966.

margins on the sale of those resources.⁹² Colonialism speaks to the concept of American exceptionalism and individualism. Capitalism requires a hierarchy of power, wealth inequality, and the exploitation of workers.⁹³ The United States is a socioeconomic hierarchy that feeds its citizens the idea that they can eventually top the hierarchy if they work hard enough. We maintain this hierarchy with the example of the very elite group of individuals and celebrities who have managed to live the "American Dream" despite insurmountable odds. The status elevation is rare and does not consider systemic and intersection systemic oppression, poverty, and racism. The stories of Oprah's rise to fame and fortune or athletes who worked their way out of poverty into the realm of celebrity are not obtainable for the vast majority of Americans.⁹⁴

Capitalism blames individuals for being poor, regardless of how hard they work, and rewards the wealthy with tax cuts and political power. The way textbooks describe alternative political and economic theory insinuates that the United States is a more sophisticated and progressive nation than others. We do not teach our students the consequences of such an individualistic economy. To understand this country's history holistically, we must start teaching our students how it has failed in the past and how those failures continue to affect our lives today. Communism and socialism are deeply misunderstood in American society. This misunderstanding stems from a lack of education. Unbiased history education requires addressing, explaining, and defining different political and economic theories to teach our students what these systems are, where they have been used, and whether they have been

⁹² "Theory of Capitalism." Theory of Capitalism, *The Center on Capitalism and Society*.
<https://capitalism.columbia.edu/theory-capitalism>.

⁹³ J. M. Blaut, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism." *Science & Society* 53, no. 3 (1989): 260-96.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40404472>.

⁹⁴ M. Corcoran, "Rags to Rags: Poverty and Mobility in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1995): 237-67. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.21.080195.001321>.

successful. History education must include political and economic theories besides capitalism to induce critical thinking and observation skills.

Colonization feeds off capitalism to create a stratified social hierarchy based on class, race, education, and gender. History textbooks confine coloniality in the United States to a period before the American Revolutionary War. Colonialism is pervasive and cannot be confined to a specific era or nation. Dismissing colonialism as a relic of the past excuses modern governments and societies from their roles in the delegation of social hierarchy. Post-coloniality cannot be achieved without the recognition of past and present structural and systemic oppression.⁹⁵ The benefactors of capitalism and colonialism have a vested interest in the maintenance of socioeconomic, racial, and political hierarchy. Without those structural inequalities, wealth, status, and racial hierarchies would not exist as we know them. History education has a responsibility to tell the stories of important historical individuals. This history ought to include the controversial and difficult stories that allowed those individuals to rise to their level of national fame. To achieve a truly post-colonial society, we can no longer ignore the legacies of violence, exploitation, and deception that built the United States. Recognition is only the first step in the long and arduous process of historical decolonization.

2.6 Conclusion

The United States is a country with a diverse and complicated history. The way that we teach history to students dictates how they conceptualize the world in which they live. Educators and scholars of United States history have a duty to present the past's realities without the systemic bias and oppression in such history textbooks and curriculum. Otherwise, college

⁹⁵ Lugones, *Towards a Decolonial Feminism*, 744.

students continue to receive a narrow and propaganda filled education. History education should not focus on date memorization and the fast recollection of facts. It should encourage students to question their reality, which is difficult but integral to the United States' growth and development as a nation. History education requires that the sins of the past are recognized and atoned. The history of the United States is the history of violence, colonialism, avoidance, and oppression. Our history textbooks must reflect and include these challenging truths. The concepts of decolonialization, critical race theory, and intersectionality are vitally important to the progression of American history education. Without the addition of these theories, history education will continue as a progressive narrative. The history of the United States is complicated and full of contradictions, controversies, and myths. If the history education taught to undergraduate students does not reflect these systemic issues, it is not functioning as it was designed.

The purpose of history education is to instill the upcoming generations with critical thinking and observation skills. When educators do not teach accurate histories, they are selling students in higher education a carefully crafted myth created by the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy to justify their position. Without holistic histories, the reason behind history education loses its meaning. A fundamental issue within these textbooks is the lack of theoretical frameworks included in the text. These theoretical frameworks do not need to dominate the text. However, the lack of decolonial, critical race, and intersectional feminist theories incorporated into these texts illuminates many of the education deficiencies facing students. To understand best the context in which they live, they must have a holistic understanding of the construction of their reality. This cannot be achieved without a comprehensive understanding of the history of their country. Present experiences reflect historical choices.

Washington, Lincoln, and Reagan's depictions in these textbooks are symptomatic of issues that plague most history books. Traditional history books tell the stories of the oppressors, the winners, and victors. They dedicate little page space to the issues created by those champions, as it can be difficult to retain a heady sense of national pride when the atrocity of those victories comes under scrutiny. It is difficult and painful to accept that this nation's greatest accomplishments came at the expense of subaltern groups, who are still oppressed to this day, especially if the students learning this history directly benefit from their oppression. It is for precisely this reason that the inclusion of historical counter-narrative is vitally important. The destruction of historical hero worship and the realization of systemic and historically based biases and oppression can aid in the dismantlement of the destructive systems that perpetuate violence against minority groups.

CHAPTER 3

OVERLOOKED/UNDERREPRESENTED EVENTS: THE 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE, THE 1954 COUP D'ÉTAT IN GUATEMALA, AND THE 1985 BOMBING OF POWELTON VILLAGE, PHILADELPHIA

3.1 Introduction

It is impossible for an undergraduate survey course or textbook to include every single historical event since the conception of the United States of America. It is only natural that textbook authors and college professors have to make decisions about what information, events, and figures are studied. The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate the exclusion of events that highlight the problematic nature of American history. Based on the research conducted for this project, American history textbooks focus on a narrow field of events, figures, and themes that create the illusion of a positively progressing master narrative. This section will explore three specific events that the required textbooks either skim over or omit: the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, the 1954 coup d'état in Guatemala, and the 1985 MOVE Bombing in Philadelphia. These events counter the narrative of U.S. history that is included in the textbook surveyed for this project. I chose these specific events because they encompass a larger thematic exclusion that is symptomatic of the books as a whole. American history textbooks are cultivated to create a specific image that serves to convince students that their country is always striving to be a better place for everyone. In light of recent events, the problematic nature of these books and the purpose of history education has come into question. We must reflect why we teach history and why we focus specific events figures and theme. The influences behind history education serves a purpose, it serves to propagate American exceptionalism within the collective consciousness of our students.

Context and information are critical to the dismantlement of white supremacy and racism within the United States and the United States' exertion of power over other countries. There is a reason courses dedicated to language, mathematics, and science begin with rudimentary material that creates a basis of knowledge on which students can build to understand extremely complex concepts and theories. History education must incorporate these same ideals if the goal is to create a society with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of political, economic, and social affairs. If the United States ever hopes to become the kind of society it purports to be, with differences viewed as lateral instead of hierarchical and post-colonial, we must create an open dialogue that displays our failures and much as our triumphs. This country was created on a foundation of slavery, genocide, and exploitation. While the blatantly obvious signs may have faded into historical memory, the consequences exist within our government, legislation, and society. Without the ability to acknowledge our societal structure, these systematic inequalities will continue to proliferate as gross disparities in power. This can manifest as violence, poverty, lack of basic resources to maintain life, and poor educational opportunities. The United States is not the most "advanced" country in the world, despite what we have been programmed to believe. It is a country that thrives off the exploitation of those who live without power. In this context, power is not rooted in the ability to control others but in the ability to control oneself. Necropolitics will be a recurring theme that is deeply intertwined with each event covered within this chapter as it interrogates who has power over the living and the dead and who has power over their histories.

Since the 1980s and the end of the isolationist period American history has become a global experience. The consequences of our actions are not contained without our borders. Often, what is beneficial for the United States can be very detrimental for the rest of the world. The

history of the United States has global implications and consequences. The mentalities of supposed isolation and individualism make it difficult for Americans to perceive the way in which our history has affected other countries in any other than a positive way. American's view themselves as the protectors of the world.⁹⁶ The defenders of democracy, the country that swoops in during world conflicts and saves the day. This attitude stems from the indoctrination students receive early in their educational career. We teach our students that the history of the United States is that of the struggle and eventual victory against tyrannical rule and that every successive war, controversy, or moral issue brings our nation closer to equality for all. This attitude is unsurprising, based on how we teach the history of the United States. The events included in history textbooks are carefully cultivated to promote the ideals of American exceptionalism and supremacy.

3.2 The Tulsa Race Massacre: Deputized White Violence

The chapter dedicated to the 1920s "The Twenties" begins with a section dedicated to "The Red Scare" detailing how the US dealt with the impending fear of communism due to the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.⁹⁷ The authors state that "this fear [of communism] was further exacerbated in 1919 with the creation of Comintern an association of Communists who pledged to incite revolution in capitalist countries around the world."⁹⁸ However, Hewitt and Lawson do not articulate whether Comintern or communism actually threatened the United States. Next, the authors briefly touch on violence against Black Americans and quickly move on to the economy of the 1920s. This includes a section on the take-off of consumerism,

⁹⁶ Sirvent, *American Exceptionalism*, 34.

⁹⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 701.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 703

urbanization, and the nefarious lending practices of banks that would lead to the Great Depression at the end of the decade. Of course, it would not be a chapter on the 1920s if the infamous flapper did not make an appearance, along with a section dedicated to prohibition. The Harlem Renaissance, Black Nationalism, and Marcus Garvey, who was a proponent of the “Back to Africa” movement, all make a brief appearance in the middle of the chapter.⁹⁹ However, only the end of the section briefly mentions the racism these groups faced and in a way that does not substantively convey the true nature of the push back against Black liberation efforts. The authors state “it is not surprising that many segments of the population resisted these [Black liberation] changes. Rallying around ethnic and racial purity, protestant fundamentalism and family values, defenders of an older America attempted to roll back the tides of modernity.”¹⁰⁰ Disguising racism behind terms like “family values” and “older America” mitigates the harm and violence that occurred during this era perpetrated by white Americans against their Black neighbors. Finally, the chapter ends with discussions of “nativism,” which categorized immigrants as “aliens [that] did not understand ‘the principles which have made our [native] civilization’ [and] blamed the influx of foreigners for society’s ‘marked deterioration’ during the 1920s.”¹⁰¹ Finally, the chapter ends with the “Resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan,” and the introduction of fundamentalist Christianity.¹⁰²

While this chapter certainly covers a vast amount of material, there is a fundamental problem skimming over violence against Black Americans by their white counterparts. The way in which this chapter portrays violence against Black Americans implies that violence only took

⁹⁹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 717.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 719.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 720.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 719, 721.

place in the year 1919, when, in reality, racial violence has been the rule of American history, not the exception. Hewitt and Lawson assert that “in 1919 race riots erupted in twenty-five cities throughout the country...the worst of these disturbances occurred in Chicago.”¹⁰³ They make no mention of other incidence of white violence against Black Americans and do not include and other years either before or after 1919. Violence perpetrated by white Americans against Black Americans is a pervasive and systemic issue. Without an accurate representation of past violence, current violence seems out of context and may be confusing for white students who have never witnessed or experienced racism or oppression.

On May 31, 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma a major massacre took place that has been silenced in modern history textbooks. Reports and accounts vary about the inciting incident and the events leading up to the massacre, but one thing we know happened is that many white, male residents of Tulsa, some deputized and others acting of their own volition, burned to the ground the Greenwood District, the place in town where African American individuals had created a thriving economic district. This massacre was not restricted to property damage. At least thirty-nine people died between May 31st and June 1st, and the injury toll is disputed to this day. The Tulsa Race Massacre, as historians now call the event, is an unconscionable story of white violence against Black Americans. Yet, despite recent expanded coverage of this violence since the 2001 Race Riot Commission Report,¹⁰⁴ there is no mention of Tulsa in the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks. The chapter dedicated to the 1920s contains a small section titled “Racial Violence in the Postwar Era”.¹⁰⁵ It details racial tensions between returning World War I

¹⁰³ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 707

¹⁰⁴ “1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.” *Tulsa Historical Society & Museum*. Accessed January 14, 2021. <https://www.tulsaohistory.org/exhibit/1921-tulsa-race-massacre/>.

¹⁰⁵ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 706

veterans, the “great migration” of Black Americans to the north in search of better opportunities, but only briefly discusses racial violence. The chapter states:

In 1919 race riots erupted in twenty-five cities throughout the country, including one in Washington, D.C... The worst of these disturbances occurred in Chicago. On a hot July day, a black youth swimming in Lake Michigan beach inadvertently crossed into an area of water customarily reserved for whites. In response, white bathers shouted at the swimmer to return to the black section of the beach and hurled stones at him. The black swimmer drowned, and word of the incident quickly spread through white and black neighborhoods in Chicago. For thirteen days, mobs of blacks and whites attacked each other, ransacked businesses, and torched homes. Over the course of the riots, at least 15 whites and 23 blacks died, 178 whites and 342 blacks were injured, and more than 1,000 black families were left homeless. Despite the turbulence of the immediate postwar period and the persistence of underlying social and racial tensions, the 1920s were a time of vigorous economic growth and urbanization.¹⁰⁶

The language used to depict the murder and subsequent reaction defuses the blame from the white perpetrators of violence and creates the illusion that Black citizens were inciting violence. As the authors mentioned, there were many racially motivated attacks throughout the United States in the years immediately following the end of World War I. The reasoning behind highlighting this instance of white violence is unclear. There are many other examples, like the Tulsa Race Massacre, that were significantly more violent, created much more property damage, and have been subjected to greater historical erasure. I am not suggesting that the authors should substitute this example with the Tulsa Race Massacre. In fact, the absence of detail in this example is concerning. The young man who drowned in Lake Michigan was named Eugene Williams, erasing his name from the historical record also erases his humanity.¹⁰⁷ Often it seems as though history textbooks distill historical events down so far that people become objects. The authors also fail to use decisive language that articulates the violence of this racially charged

¹⁰⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 707

¹⁰⁷ “The Red Summer of 1919.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, December 2, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/chicago-race-riot-of-1919>.

massacre. Eugene's manner of death may have been drowning but they also fail to say that he was murdered. While it may seem like using such language removes the neutral tone from the writing, without such language the perpetrators of such crimes are viewed as less responsible for their actions. Using harsh language and words such as "murdered" and "massacre" highlights the irregularity of such actions.

The authors are also guilty of using passive voice, stating that "blacks were injured" removes the locus of responsibility from the violent white mob that attacked Black Americans.¹⁰⁸ This dispersal of blame makes the history of white violence more palatable to a white audience. Looking back on past events with neutral rhetoric make it seem as if violence was the norm and blame can be defused equally between both parties. The subtle yet overwhelming ideology of white supremacy does not have to include the burning of crosses or the dawning of white hoods to be violent. The way the past is characterized within our history books tells our students, not only how we think about and experience history but, how we experience the present moment. The blame for violence against Black Americans is defused to include the individual murdered by the police on the streets of Minneapolis or countless other American cities.

The authors state that in 1919 alone there were race riots in "twenty-five cities throughout the country".¹⁰⁹ They fail to mention that many more took place in the next few years. This omission creates the illusion that racial violence was contained in the year 1919. This is, of course, categorically untrue. Racially based violence is one of the United States enduring legacies as is its elimination from the master narrative. The exclusion of the Tulsa Race Massacre from the textbook is not uncommon. In fact, I myself had not heard of this event until I

¹⁰⁸ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 707.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

was in graduate school. The normalization of omissions about racially based violence is incredibly problematic. Lynching makes only the briefest of appearances within the pages of the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks. In the index, the term only directs the reader to a total of five pages. Out of those five pages, only two sentences mention that lynching is violence against Black individuals or their white allies. Although the index claims that Emmett Till is mentioned on page 868, appropriately in the chapter dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Till is not referenced on that page or anywhere else in the textbook.

By isolating lynching in history and not discussing other forms of racially based murder, the textbook loses an opportunity to draw connections. The textbook describes lynching as an act of the past, stating that lynching was a consequence for when “blacks tried to overstep the bounds of Jim Crow in any way that white found unacceptable...between 1884 and 1900, nearly 1,700 blacks were lynched in the South.”¹¹⁰ Lynching is not a historical memory. It is a very real and current issue facing people of color in the United States. As recently as 2020, Black men have been found hanging in trees across the country.¹¹¹ These deaths have been ruled as suicides even after massive protests by the family and communities of the victims. Racially-based murders, like racism, discrimination, and oppression have evolved to fit into the 21st century. The evolution of technology and social media has created an enormous platform for the “spectacle of lynching.”¹¹² The performative murder of Black individuals, usually Black men, has continued long past Reconstruction, the early Civil Rights Era, and the postbellum South. Amy Wood

¹¹⁰ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 547

¹¹¹ Sandra E. Garcia, “Families Challenge Suicide in Deaths of Black Men Found Hanging From Trees.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/us/robert-fuller-malcolm-harsch-deaths.html>.

¹¹² Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2.

asserts that “the definition of lynching [is] itself open to contestation and change.”¹¹³ Lynching requires exhibition. Modern murders are captured on cellphone video and uploaded to social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and TikTok. Many consider the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Oscar Grant III, and so many other Black Americans to be akin to lynching.¹¹⁴

The erasure of violence against Black Americans, specifically by white Americans and law enforcement, creates the illusion that individual hate causes these acts and not a system that is in place to perpetuate such violence. A study conducted from 2013-2020 demonstrated that Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed by the police than their white counterparts.¹¹⁵ Historically, law enforcement officials have taken part in and allowed lynching to occur.¹¹⁶ According to Jhacova Williams and Carl Romer of the Economic Policy Institute, “some have speculated that as many as 75% of historical lynchings ‘were perpetrated with the direct or indirect assistance of law enforcement personnel.’ Despite drawing attention from large crowds, many perpetrators of historical lynchings were never charged with a crime—a fact seen in many modern-day officer-involved shootings.”¹¹⁷ In fact, Aatish Taseer of the New York Times states that “lynching is much more than just a murder. A murder may occur in private. A

¹¹³ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Michael Deegan-McCree, “Floyd and Arbery Killings Are Modern-Day Lynchings.” *USA Today* (Tysons, VA), Gannett Satellite Information Network, June 3, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/policing/2020/06/03/floyd-and-arbery-killings-modern-day-lynchings-column/5299931002/>.

¹¹⁵ Mapping Police Violence, 2021. <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>.

¹¹⁶ Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 192.

¹¹⁷ Jhacova Williams and Carl Romer. “Black Deaths at the Hands of Law Enforcement Are Linked to Historical Lynchings: U.S. Counties Where Lynchings Were More Prevalent from 1877 to 1950 Have More Officer-Involved Killings.” *Economic Policy Institute*, 2020. <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-deaths-at-the-hands-of-law-enforcement-are-linked-to-historical-lynchings-u-s-counties-where-lynchings-were-more-prevalent-from-1877-to-1950-have-more-officer-involved-killings/>.

lynching is a public spectacle; it demands an audience... A lynching is a majority's way of telling a minority population that the law cannot protect it."¹¹⁸ Lynching does not happen behind closed doors or away from the prying eyes of the public, it is a spectacle, a form of entertainment.

The exclusion of the Tulsa Race Massacre may not seem problematic when we consider that its poor documentation and that the true death, injury, and property damage estimations are still disputed. It is unclear how the massacre started, who lit the fires, and how many people participated.¹¹⁹ Clearly, though, a white mob destroyed the Greenwood District of Tulsa, also known as Black Wallstreet, and left dozens dead and thousands homeless. This history matters not only due to the violence against Black people but because the massacre wiped from collective conscience the fact that Black Americans in the South had created an economically successful neighborhood despite racism and oppression they faced.

In early 2001, the state of Oklahoma published the findings of The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Commission. First, it is important to acknowledge the whitewashing of the language used in the naming of this commission. As of November of 2018, the name of the commission has officially been changed to The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Commission. A riot is defined as "a tumultuous disturbance of the public peace by three or more persons assembled together and acting with common intent."¹²⁰ Conversely, a massacre is "the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or unresisting human beings under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty." It is vitally important to use the appropriate terminology when addressing such an event. The term

¹¹⁸ Aatish Taseer, "Anatomy of a Lynching." *The New York Times* (New York, NY), April 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/opinion/anatomy-of-a-lynching.html>.

¹¹⁹ Randy Krehbiel, *TULSA, 1921: Reporting a Massacre* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 31.

¹²⁰ "1921 Tulsa Race Massacre." Tulsa Historical Society & Museum.

riot distorts the reality and the experiences of those affected by the destruction of the Greenwood District. It allows the leeway to assume that Black people were creating a disturbance instead of reacting to the violence of white aggressors. Eighty years after the deadly massacre the commission found that Black Tulsans were acting to protect Dick Rowland from the violent mob attempting to remove him from the jail. The report found that the government officials acted in an inappropriate and dangerous manners by deputizing and arming many white men who went on to committed illegal and violent acts. These acts included vandalism, theft, unlawful detention, arson, and murder. Despite these clearly illegal actions, not a single white person was ever “prosecuted or punished by the government at any level, municipal, county state, or federal.”¹²¹ Black Tulsans got no legal justice or financial reparations to rebuild their homes or businesses.

The reason behind the exclusion of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 from the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks is unclear. It is a commonly overlooked event, and many Americans are unaware it took place. The authors missed an opportunity to introduce critical race theory when they choose to exclude the Tulsa Race Massacre from their text. The events in Tulsa are a prime example of acceptable racism with parallels in today’s society. As I write this section, armed militia have infiltrated the United States capitol in an attempt to stop the Vice President from counting and certifying the Electoral College votes, a formality required to ensure Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s inauguration as the 46th president of the United States. This violence comes on the heels of the Black Lives Matter protests that took place all over the United States during 2020 that protested the violent murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of the police. These protests were overwhelmingly peaceful and yet the federal government spent

¹²¹ “1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.” Tulsa Historical Society & Museum.

months violently attacking protestors with tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and other forms of “less lethal munitions.”¹²² The Guardian reported that “At least 11 Americans have been killed while participating in political demonstrations this year [2020] and another 14 have died in other incidents linked to political unrest.”¹²³ These same violent dispersal tactics were not used in the same level of ferocity on the heavily armed individuals who have stormed our nation's capital building. There is a distinct and historic pattern of the acceptability of white violence and violence against people of color in the United States.¹²⁴ Yet, this pattern is not highlighted within our history textbooks in a way that clearly asserts the power disparity between white and Black Americans.

When Congress resumed their session, Republican Representative Matt Gaetz gave a speech likening the events of the day to the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in 2020.¹²⁵ He willfully failed to distinguish the domestic terrorist/seditious attempted coup/or other term violence that took place on the grounds and inside the capitol building from the First Amendment right to peacefully protest Black Lives Matter in 2020. These claims are not only categorically false, the violence that took place during Black Lives Matter protests was almost always instigated by police or federal forces, but deliberately missed the purpose of these examples. Black Lives Matter activists took to the streets of numerous cities across the United

¹²² Sanya Mansoor, “93% Of Black Lives Matter Protests Have Been Peaceful: Report.” *Time Magazine*, September 5, 2020. <https://time.com/5886348/report-peaceful-protests/>.

¹²³ Lois Beckett, “At Least 25 Americans Were Killed during Protests and Political Unrest in 2020.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, October 31, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/31/americans-killed-protests-political-unrest-acled>.

¹²⁴ Lois Beckett, “US Police Three Times as Likely to Use Force against Leftwing Protesters, Data Finds.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, January 14, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/13/us-police-use-of-force-protests-black-lives-matter-far-right>.

¹²⁵ Teo Armus, “Rep. Matt Gaetz and Other GOP Politicians Baselessly Suggest Antifa Is to Blame for pro-Trump Mob Rioting into Capitol.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, January 7, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/01/07/antifa-capitol-gaetz-trump-riot/>.

States to protest the state and federally sanctioned murder of Black Americans. The rioters that stormed the capitol building committed acts of domestic terrorism in a failed coup d'état. The Federal Bureau of Investigation defines domestic terrorism as “violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”¹²⁶ According to this definition, the violence committed against Black Tulsans on May 31st and June 1st of 1921 and at on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 were acts of domestic terrorism. Yet, the mainstream historical record often completely ignores this pattern. Acts of international terrorism, such as the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, are included within the textbooks because they represent a violent situation perpetrated against the United States that brought a majority of American people together and created an atmosphere of national pride.¹²⁷ Incidents like that of the Tulsa Race Massacre are horrifying examples of the proliferation of racism that continue to plague the United States and Black Americans 100 years later.

In the United States, violence is only unacceptable when it challenges institutional authority. In Tulsa, Black residents took to the streets in an attempt to keep Dick Rowland from falling victim to a white mob's violence. White residents of Tulsa were armed and given the power to commit heinous acts of violence against their Black counterparts. It is imperative that our students learn about these historical events and get the theoretical tools to understand how systemic racism has not only allowed them to occur but to excuse the actions of the perpetrators. Racism is the reason Black people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor died at the hands of police, and their murders have yet to face charges. Racism is the reason Dick Rowland was

¹²⁶ “Terrorism.” FBI. FBI, May 3, 2016. <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

¹²⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 1011

arrested for possibly touching a white woman in an elevator. Racism is the reason Black Lives Matter protests were met with state and federally sanctioned violence and murder despite protestors at ninety-three percent of those protests being completely nonviolent.

Critical race theory explains that “racism is ordinary...the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this [the United States] country.”¹²⁸ It is challenging for many Americans to acknowledge that racism plays such an integral role in our society. The reality of our society is that police and government serve to enforce the race and class divide, not public safety. This country treats “Black grief as violence and white rage as a sacrament.”¹²⁹ The prodigious violence that met Black Lives Matter protestors and activists further highlights this point. Especially when contrasted with the events of January 6, 2021. An overwhelmingly white group of rioters destroyed and looted federal property for hours and even bludgeoned a police officer to death and were then calmly escorted out of the capitol of the United States. Only a few months ago a young man was shot in the face with a tear gas canister while merely exercising his first amendment right to peacefully assemble. Balin Blake lost his eye, and many others died in the streets at the hands of police and federally sanctioned violence, while protesting that exact thing.¹³⁰

The textbooks analyzed for this project hides controversial histories by skimming over events and themes of systemic violence and oppression or omitting its existence all together.

¹²⁸ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris. *Critical Race Theory: an Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017), 21.

¹²⁹ Jacqui Lewis, Twitter Post. January 6, 2021, 7:02PM
<https://twitter.com/RevJacquiLewis/status/1346985488058621959>

¹³⁰ Karli VanCleave, “‘I Want You to Look Me in My Eye and Say That You're Sorry’: Man Who Lost His Eye Protesting Says He Demands a Response from the Mayor.” *WPTA21* (Fort Wayne, IN), June 18, 2020.
<https://wpta21.com/2020/06/17/i-want-you-to-look-me-in-my-eye-and-say-that-youre-sorry-man-who-lost-his-eye-protesting-says-he-demands-a-response-from-the-mayor/#:~:text=FORT%20WAYNE%20Ind.,old%20life.%22%20Brake%20said.>

Without access to this information many students cannot connect historic violence against Black Americans to the current sociopolitical events taking place in the United States. White supremacy did not start with Donald Trump; he was merely capitalized on the racist sentiments that have existed in this country since before its conception. While the authors do dedicate several sections in multiple chapters to white supremacy, racism, and civil rights there is a lack of thematic connection that creates the illusion that these people and events took place within a vacuum and are not necessarily connected. To acknowledge the history behind the events of January 6, 2021 would be tantamount to the destruction of American exceptionalism within Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks. It destroys the mythology surrounding American history and exposes the real issues and consequences that deeply effect how the United States operates as a nation.

3.3 The 1954 Coup D'état in Guatemala: U.S. History as a Global Experience

Events included in the textbooks categorically fail to include the global implications of U.S. involvement overseas, specifically the direct involvement and consequences of the United States in Central America. The current economically driven immigration and refugee issues at the Southern border directly relate to the United States' historical involvement in Central America. The United States is responsible for the instability in Central America. Yet, we refuse to acknowledge our continued perpetuation of poverty and violence to uphold specific political and economic agendas. Specifically, Guatemala has suffered exponentially after the U.S. funded coup d'état in 1954. The omission of controversial details from history textbooks, like in the case of Guatemala, distorts the reality of the current situation at the southern border. Students require access to accurate and neutrally presented facts in order to construct a realistic view of the country in which they live. Students must have the ability to connect the history of the past to

their present life experiences. This will enable students to make informed decisions about their lives and critically understand their place in the sociopolitical hierarchy.

Chapter 17 “Workers and Farmers of the Age of Organization” gives the briefest overview of communism “Marx argued that capital and labor were engaged in a class struggle that would end with a violent overthrow of capitalist government and its replacement by communism.”¹³¹ For those already versed in communist theory this definition is sufficient. However, it is essential to remember that these textbooks introduce history to freshmen and sophomore students. Educators and authors should not assume that young students would have any experience with oppositional political ideology, including capitalism. A foundation in political theory ought to precede any subject matter pertaining to the Cold War or alternative political ideologies. Chapter 24 “The Opening of the Cold War” solely focuses on the Cold War by exploring the Truman Doctrine, the Korean War, the Second Red Scare, McCarthyism, the Eisenhower Doctrine, interventions in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. While the chapter briefly mentions the 1954 coup in Guatemala, the textbook seriously underrepresents the topic of United States sanctioned global intervention and their consequences.

The authors manage to create an intense juxtaposition between capitalism and communism without ever fully explaining either of these economic theories. Normalizing the myriad invasions of other, much smaller countries for the sake of containing communism when the motives were often far more complex. Hewitt and Lawson explicate that the Eisenhower Doctrine “proved more concerned with protecting access to oil fields...than any Communist insurrection.”¹³² However, the fail to highlight the importance of this momentous this policy was

¹³¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 561, 573-74.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 837.

in shaping the relationship between the United States and countries with differing political or economic ideologies. With the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States played a major role in the destabilization of Central America, including the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. South America, The Middle East, South Asia, and parts of Africa. While all of these events mentioned are important, the history of the United States is not solely the story of the triumph of capitalism over all other political and economic philosophies. It is the story of violence perpetrated by the United States or with aid from the United States against people who lack the resources to defend themselves and their families against the greatest military power in modern history.

The Cold War defines an era in not only the history of the United States, but that of the entire world. The policy of containment started myriad global conflicts that have current economic, environmental, and political ramifications. The second volume of Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks includes two chapters focusing on the years between 1945 and 1961. The first focusing on the Cold War and the second focusing on the social and economic changes during those decades. Most notably this includes the post-World War II economic and baby boom and the Civil Rights Movement.

The United States has a long history of interfering in other nation's politics and government to advance U.S. economic interests. The 1954 U.S. sanctioned coup d'état in Guatemala is a paramount example. The textbook states that:

In 1954 the economics of fruit and shipping replaced oil as the catalyst for U.S. involvement into a third-world nation within its own sphere of influence. The elected socialist regime of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala had seized 225,000 acres of land held by the United Fruit Company, a powerful American company in which Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, CIA director Allen Dulles, held stock. According to the Dulles brothers, the land's seizure by the Guatemalan government posed a threat to the nearby Panama Canal. Eisenhower allowed the CIA to hatch a plot that resulted in a coup d'état, or government overthrow, that installed a right-wing

military regime in Guatemala, which safeguarded both the Panama Canal and the United Fruit Company.¹³³

Hewitt and Lawson use vague language that does not begin to describe the realities of Guatemala in the 1950s. They categorically fail to contextualize the redistribution of land to native Guatemalans or to explain that the United Fruit Company was using forced labor and perpetrating human rights abuses. All of these facts are incredibly important to understand the international relations between the United States and Guatemala in the 1950s and today. The textbook also fails to discuss the consequences of the United States sanctioned overthrow of a democratically elected leader, which we currently experience with global climate change, the migrant crisis at the United States southern border, and the continued violence in Guatemala against citizens.¹³⁴ This portion of the textbook is a perfect opportunity to introduce a discussion on how past events, which may seem historically insignificant to an undergraduate student, are actually still incredibly relevant and directly influence their lives.

Next, it is important to interrogate why the authors did not seize this opportunity. The United States has always touted itself as the bastion of democracy, the savior of the free world, and the nation of equality. It is because of these imagined traits that our textbooks uphold the characteristics of American exceptionalism. While it may not be the authors' intent to do so, it is clearly visible in the choices of histories to include and those to omit. The United States was especially sensitive to what they perceived to be communist or socialist agendas. Árbenz's tenure as leader of Guatemala saw massive reforms that challenged the neoliberal and exploitative practices of the United Fruit Company (UFC), who had been taking advantage of the lack of

¹³³ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 836.

¹³⁴ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand and Karen A. Pren, "Why Border Enforcement Backfired." *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 5 (2016): 1561. <https://doi.org/10.1086/684200>.

regulation and had been exploiting Guatemalan resources and workers for years. The UFC successfully lobbied for the United States to overthrow the democratically elected leader. This led to the installation of the military dictator Carlos Castillo Armas, and would eventually lead to a civil war and the genocide of the Maya people. This is important: the United States involvement in the coup d'état in Guatemala and continued support of right-wing military regimes and death squads in the 1970s and 1980s caused thousands of people from Central America to flee to the United States for safety. The United States actively contributed to the push factors that have driven people out of their homes in the search for safety and stability.¹³⁵ The United States had similar involvement in all over Latin America for the better part of a century. El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and many others. These countries have all faced sanctioned or direct violence from the United States for various reasons. Much of this violence was under the guise of “détente” or “the relaxation of strained relations or tensions (as between nations).”¹³⁶ Yet, none of the true damage is even alluded to within the textbooks.

Once again, we see the use of buzzwords like “socialism” introduced with no context or explanation. It is especially important now that alternate political and economic theories include correct, clear definitions within our required reading material. The current political atmosphere in the United States has bred the vast spread of misinformation. Conservative politicians use terms like “socialism” and “communism” to incite fear and panic in the American people, a trend popularized in the early 20th century. Most believe that our elected officials create policies to

¹³⁵ Jonathan Blitzer and Mauricio Lima, “Guatemala Emigration Report.” *Pulitzer Center*, April 3, 2019. <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/guatemala-emigration-report>.

¹³⁶ “Détente.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/d%C3%A9tente>.

protect their constituents. While that ought to be the goal of our political system, we can see by examining incidents like the 1954 coup in Guatemala that often the interests of large corporations come before that of anyone else. This is a foreign concept to many Americans because they are unaware of the serious issues with the economic theory and practice of capitalism.

Capitalism requires a hierarchical social stratification that monetarily values the human life based on their socioeconomic status and access to resources. Power is only valuable if there are those who live without it. To create this vertical stratification, a sophisticated process of “othering” takes place on a micro, meso, and macro sociocultural level.¹³⁷ Those who hold power and valuable assets at the cost of much of the population living without access to necessary resources. Much of this class stratification is based on racial and gender subaltern groups who live in a cycle of poverty that is nearly inescapable.¹³⁸ The American people have long been fed a lie about the benefits of a capitalist economy. Capitalism does not lift people out of poverty, a few may fight their way out, but they are able to do despite of capitalism, not because of capitalism. Deanna Jacobsen Koepke states that:

Poverty does serve certain functions for a capitalist society. It keeps a pool of low-skilled workers available for jobs no one else will do. It keeps prices down, via the inflation argument. It also creates jobs for people who can regulate and/or service the poor...for all intents and purposes, the poor are treated like objects. They are in society, but not part of it because they have no voice in the government.¹³⁹

Capitalism is a global phenomenon, and the consequences of American capitalism are a global experience. The crux of American capitalism is the extreme exploitation of the worker, the hoarding of wealthy by the top 1%, and the ever-present myth of the American Dream.

¹³⁷ Deanna Jacobsen Koepke, "Race, Class, Poverty, and Capitalism." *Race, Gender & Class* 14, no. 3/4 (2007): 190.

¹³⁸ Koepke, *Race, Class, Poverty, and Capitalism*, 197.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 193-3

University of Wisconsin-Madison sociologist Joel Rogers asserts that the United States operates on a system he has termed “Low-road capitalism” explaining that:

In a capitalist society that goes low, wages are depressed as businesses compete over the price, not the quality, of goods; so-called unskilled workers are typically incentivized through punishments, not promotions; inequality reigns and poverty spreads. In the United States, the richest 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of the country’s wealth, while a larger share of working-age people (18-65) live in poverty than in any other nation belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D.).¹⁴⁰

This form of capitalism creates incredible economic disparity and a hierarchy that not only allows but advocates for the exploitation of the working class. Educational exploitation has led to the belief in survivorship bias, the concept that because few individuals have moved up economic and social classes that those who are unable are inherently flawed or lazy.¹⁴¹ We have made unionizing illegal in many states and fields of work and pitted peers against one another in order to increase productivity and profit. Capitalism in the United States has created a society and culture based on elitism and classism. Race, gender, and sexuality play major roles in these systems of oppression because of the historic exclusion of women, people of color, and subaltern sexualities and genders. The United States economy and by extension our government have a vested interest promoting capitalism and creating an educational environment that negatively stigmatized alternative economic theories and practices.

The silent nature of these historical events serves a direct purpose. While the textbook briefly mentions the coup in Guatemala, it does nothing to discuss the catalytic nature of that and similar events in Central America. There is a direct thematic relationship between U.S.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew Desmond, “American Capitalism Is Brutal. You Can Trace That to the Plantation.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), August 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html>.

¹⁴¹ Brendan Miller, “How 'Survivorship Bias' Can Cause You to Make Mistakes.” *BBC Worklife*. BBC, August 28, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200827-how-survivorship-bias-can-cause-you-to-make-mistakes>.

involvement in the military takeover of Guatemala in the 1950s and the current migrant and refugee crisis at the southern border. The xenophobic narrative about immigrants, most recently modeled by Donald Trump and his supporters, is historic. Xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments, and anti-immigration policies are a cornerstone of American culture. Exclusion of immigration and citizenship from non-white individuals dates back centuries.¹⁴² From quotas to exclusionary acts, the United States has often created legislation that specifically targeted non-European individuals.¹⁴³

In 1985 President Ronald Reagan “declared undocumented migration to be ‘a threat to national security’ and warned that ‘terrorists and subversives [are] just two days driving time from’” crossing the border in Texas.¹⁴⁴ This racist and misinformed rhetoric still influences the legislation in place today, even though “[t]o this day, politicians, pundits, and bureaucrats continue to call for more border enforcement, despite the fact that net undocumented migration has been zero or negative since 2008, with unauthorized entries and exists in rough balance.”¹⁴⁵ This climate of fear and racism toward immigrants without the understanding of the socioeconomic institutions has helped create and intensify immigration. The enforcement of the Southern border and the billions spent on it do not address “the economic drivers of migration ... nor does it take into account the existence of well-developed networks able to support and sustain undocumented border crossing and this circumvent[s] enforcement efforts.”¹⁴⁶ Ironically,

¹⁴² D’Vera Cohn, “How U.S. Immigration Laws and Rules Have Changed through History.” *Pew Research Center*, May 30, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/30/how-u-s-immigration-laws-and-rules-have-changed-through-history>.

¹⁴³ U.S. Department of State. Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

¹⁴⁴ Massey, Durand and. Pren, “Why Border Enforcement Backfired,” 2016

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1563.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1564.

the militarization of the Southern border has, in fact, reduced the return rate of previously seasonal workers who have now settled in the United States to avoid the increased risks of crossing the border. Since the early 1980s, the number of individuals immigrating to the United States emanating from The Northern Triangle has grown “by more than 1,350 percent.”¹⁴⁷

Students get these histories with little to no context for understanding their lasting and damaging effects. Decolonization of our nation’s history requires that we move outside of our physical borders to the places our past policies and violence still deeply effect.

Anibal Quijano, scholar of postcolonial studies, asserts that “globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power.”¹⁴⁸ The United States has used its immense military power to destabilize small countries, like Guatemala, to exploit resources and labor. Now, the U.S. is experiencing the consequences of these actions. The coup in Guatemala is but one example of the myriad times the United States has interfered in another nation to protect resources are not ours. To decolonize our history requires the decolonization of knowledge and the decolonization of the collective American psyche. The further I delve into the research for this project the more I am confronted by the vast amount of propaganda that is included within the pages of our history textbooks. We take no responsibility for the role we played destabilizing Central America and the resulting exodus of migrants. We do not teach our students that the United States chooses profit over human rights.¹⁴⁹ Our society is based around the concept of

¹⁴⁷ Jessica Bolter, Jeanne Batalova and Allison O’Connor, “Central American Immigrants in the United States.” *Migration Policy Institute*, February 2, 2021. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states-2017>.

¹⁴⁸ Quijano and Ennis, *Coloniality of Power*, 533.

¹⁴⁹ Stefanie Khoury and David Whyte, “How Human Rights Law Has Been Used to Guarantee Corporations a 'Right to Profit'.” *The Conversation*, October 23, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/how-human-rights-law-has-been-used-to-guarantee-corporations-a-right-to-profit-74593>.

individualism, which is the “fundamental assumption is the conception of the individual as an isolated entity separated from its own environment, living as a self -sufficient being. From this conception, what society is, how society works, is exclusively explained in terms of the behaviour [sic] of such individuals; ultimately, the individual is the cause and the only constituent of society.”¹⁵⁰ The persistent belief and individual people are responsible for their personal live experiences disallows many American’s from accepting the responsibility for the role of our nation and our unique expression of power. Individualism allows the United States to blame Guatemalan refugees for their plight, regardless of our role in its creation. Decolonization of our history textbooks requires that the concept of American exceptionalism is specifically included so our students can apply that framework to the histories of their country.

Chapter 28 “The Triumph of Conservatism, the end of the Cold War, and the Rise of the New World Order” focuses on the years 1980-1992.¹⁵¹ Mainly focusing on the presidency of Ronald Reagan and his economic policies. The chapter dedicated to the 1980s focuses overly on the Cold War, and anti-communism tactics. Although the authors state that both Carter’s and Reagan’s administrations interfered in the Caribbean in Cuba and Nicaragua, they do not express to their readers that this interference should not be considered “normal.” The use of United States funds and military to overthrow other nations’ governments should not be overlooked. The consequences of these actions are immense and do not only affect the people from these regions but have real-life consequences for the American public. This is yet another instance when the authors ought to have discussed the motivations behind the United States involvement in these Central American countries. Again, Communism is not defined, yet is the textbook gives it a

¹⁵⁰ Conceição Soares, “The Philosophy of Individualism: A Critical Perspective,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Social Values* 1, no. 1 (2018): 11. <https://doi.org/10.34632/philosophyandsocialvalues.2018.2664>.

¹⁵¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 959.

clear negative connotation. The lack of explanation upholds capitalist values and, by association, American exceptionalism.

3.4 The Philadelphia MOVE Bombing: The Silencing of a City

It is almost ironic that the section that covers the year 1985 focuses on “fighting international terrorism.”¹⁵² During that same year, the government of Philadelphia committed acts of domestic terrorism against their own citizens. However, this chapter makes no mention of the bombing and intentional burning of a Black residential area. It swiftly moves from Reaganomics to globalization and once again the Cold War. The erasure of violence against Black Americans is an expression of immense necropolitical power over the counter-narrative of American exceptionalism.

MOVE (also stylized M.O.V.E.) is an organization formed by John Africa in the early 1970s around the principles of anarcho-primitivism and animal rights. Their ideology was purposely enigmatic. As time progressed, their views and actions radicalized.¹⁵³ After clashes with neighbors about various issues, MOVE had their first deadly encounter with the Philadelphia police in a 1978 standoff, which led to the death of a police officer and the injury of over a dozen police and firefighters. Hostilities continued to brew for several years culminating in the 1985 bombing of the MOVE compound in Powelton Village. The bomb and subsequent fires killed eleven MOVE members including John Africa and five children. This incident represents the only time in American history that United States government bombed their own citizens within the continental United States. One of the most troubling outcomes of this event is

¹⁵² Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 971.

¹⁵³ Michael Boyette and Randi Boyette. *Let It Burn: MOVE, the Philadelphia Police Department, and the Confrontation That Changed a City* (San Diego, CA: Quadrant Books, 2013).

its absence from the master narrative of American history. A record of this incident is not available in the textbooks surveyed for this project nor is it common knowledge among many Americans. Prior to the beginning of this project, I asked many people, ranging from family members and friends, to peers and professors how old they were when they heard of this event. The shocking answer I received from the majority of these people was that they had never learned about the 1985 bombing and my question was the first time hearing of the event. These answers did not surprise me. I myself was doing research for this project when I stumbled upon this information. The bombing of American citizens is certainly an event, which ought to be included in every American history textbook that covers the 20th century.

The MOVE bombing is one of several incidents of gross misconduct perpetrated by the United States government that is not included in the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks. These omissions send a clear message about how the education system wishes students to remember United States history. The controversial events that are included in the textbooks often do not include the government, federal, state, or municipal, as the instigators of violence. As discussed previously, necropolitics is the concept that the sovereign power has control how people live and most importantly, how they die.¹⁵⁴ The city of Philadelphia explicitly expressed this power when they dropped an improvised bomb comprised on plastic explosives on the roof of a row house and then did nothing to control the subsequent fire. In total, more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition were fired into the building, 65 homes were destroyed, and 250 people were homeless. This event cost the city of Philadelphia millions of dollars and over 30 years later Powelton Village has yet to fully recover.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 11-40.

¹⁵⁵ Boyette and Boyette. *Let It Burn*, 645.

The 1985 MOVE Bombing is an incredibly important historical event. Its erasure from historical memory highlights the importance of American exceptionalism to our education system. When textbooks include events that portray any tier of government in a negative light, it is always quickly followed up with the solution and reaffirms the teleological nature of American history. For example, when discussing the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the fraud perpetrated by the Union Pacific Company, the book states “[t]hey also bribed congressmen to avoid investigation into their sordid dealings. Despite these efforts, in 1872 Congress exposed this corruption.”¹⁵⁶ That is the end of the story. The authors simply state that an illegal act occurred and that it was quickly rectified. With this formula in place, the exclusion of the MOVE bombing is understandable. The city of Philadelphia categorically failed to make any meaningful amends for the role they played in the 1985 bombing. Poorly constructed structures replaced the destroyed row houses and ended up costing the city approximately \$570,000 each.¹⁵⁷ The bombing of the MOVE compound was a disaster. It resulted in the death of eleven people and devastated a community. Racism played an important role in the instigation and result of this event. We must ask ourselves and our students if the outcome would have been different if this had taken place in a predominantly white neighborhood. As exemplified by the events of January 6, 2021, the treatment of individuals in this country varies drastically based on skin color.

The addition of events like the MOVE bombing to required textbooks in undergraduate survey courses is vital to the deconstruction of the ideology of American exceptionalism within the master narrative of American history. Our students must know the failures of this nation to

¹⁵⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 493.

¹⁵⁷ Francis X. Clines, “15 Years and Millions Later, Bombing Plagues Philadelphia.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), August 13, 2000.

put our triumphs into perspective. Context is incredibly important in the study of history. The second volume of the Hewitt and Lawson textbook is hyper-focused on the Cold War, technological, and economic development. They leave little room to discuss the ways in which the government has failed its constituents. Without the ability to highlight and discuss the failures of the United States, our students only receive a distorted, partial view of American history. If our textbooks included the MOVE bombing or other examples of state sanctioned violence and murder, it would be tantamount to admitting to committing human rights violations within our borders. Our students have been socialized and educated to believe that the government, law enforcement, and the military exist to protect the citizens of this country. The education system, thus far, seems to serve to indoctrinate students with the ideology of American exceptionalism. It is this reason that so many people are disconcerted with the recent protests against police brutality.

The MOVE bombing's erasure from Hewitt and Lawson's textbook is symptomatic of the systemic erasure of Black history from the master narrative of American history. The textbooks illustrate Black history segmentally by briefly highlighting one event within several decades to express the experiences of all Black Americans. This is evident in the previously discussed case of Eugene Williams in the late 1910s and is equally as present in the discussion of the Scottsboro Nine in the early 1930s and the Tuskegee Airmen in the 1940s.¹⁵⁸ In fact, there is no substantial information about the Black experience in the modern United States until midway through Chapter 25 "Troubled Innocence."¹⁵⁹ Exactly nine pages from this chapter are dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement in the South.¹⁶⁰ Conversely, the textbook dedicates the entirety of

¹⁵⁸ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 743, 786.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 849.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 865-874.

Chapter 23 “World War II”, or 37 pages, to World War II.¹⁶¹ World War II was a defining moment in the history of the United States and its five years deserve space within our textbooks but so do decades of monumental changes for race relations. The textbooks lack any substantive information of governmental acts of violence against Black Americans that has not come to a result in some sort of positive action taken by the government. The MOVE bombing is a perfect example of this phenomenon. The city of Philadelphia waited until November of 2020 to issue a formal apology to the last living member of MOVE who survived the 1985 bombing. It took the city over 30 years to recognize and apologize for an act of domestic terrorism sanctioned by the local government.¹⁶²

3.5 State Requirements and American Exceptionalism

The government of Texas play an active role in curriculum development and course requirements. According to the Texas Education Code §51.301:

Every college and university receiving state support or state aid from public funds shall give a course of instruction in government or political science which includes consideration of the Constitution of the United States and the constitutions of the states, with special emphasis on that of Texas. This course shall have a credit value of not less than six semester hours or its equivalent. Except as provided by Subsection (c), a college or university receiving state support or state aid from public funds may not grant a baccalaureate degree or a lesser degree or academic certificate to any person unless the person has credit for such a course.

The University of North Texas satisfies these requirements with core curriculum that requires all undergraduate students to take six credit hours in United States history. These courses are United States History Until to 1865 (HIST 2610) and United States History from 1865 (HIST 2620).

¹⁶¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 775.

¹⁶² John Ismay, “35 Years After MOVE Bombing That Killed 11, Philadelphia Apologizes.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), November 13, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/us/philadelphia-bombing-apology-move.html>.

According to the university:

Courses in this category focus on the consideration of past events and ideas relative to the United States, with the option of including Texas History for a portion of this component area. Courses involve the interaction among individuals, communities, states, the nation, and the world, considering how these interactions have contributed to the development of the United States and its global role.¹⁶³

These courses focus on pre-colonial origins to the Civil War and then post-civil war to the end of the Cold War. Counter to what the university claims these courses focus on, after an in-depth review and analysis of the required textbooks there is an incredible lack of controversial histories that directly relate to the development and current state of the United States.

However, it should be noted that this assessment may be complicated by the fact that some professors may deviate from the textbook material within their classrooms and courses.¹⁶⁴ Due to the large student population, the dozens of courses being taught during the semester, and multiple professors teaching these required courses it is not feasible to analyze supplemental sources at this time. The focus is direct at the required textbooks because they are intended to serve as a foundation for these courses, regardless of other material included by professors.

The state has a vested interest in the information that is disseminated within our public universities. All of the information included in the required courses and textbooks illustrates the federal and state government in an ultimately positive light. The authors present a historical issue, conflict, or situation and then move through the history to the end result, which is typically stated as a positive ending to an unfortunate situation. The chapter dedicated to the end of the Civil War follows this narrative. Chapter 13 “Civil War” of Volume I highlights an overview of

¹⁶³ University Core Curriculum - University of North Texas - Acalog ACMSTTM. Accessed March 14, 2021. <http://catalog.unt.edu/content.php?catoid=20&navoid=2148>.

¹⁶⁴ Dr. Jennifer Wallach, email to author, March 1, 2021.

the war, the inciting incidents and the conclusions of the 13th Amendment.¹⁶⁵ This chapter makes no mention of people held in bondage in Texas for two years past the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. This may seem like an insignificant omission, after all, textbooks cannot be expected to include every single historical event. However, the exclusion of this particular event is interesting. We must ask: who does it serve to exclude this information? The state of Texas reinforces the ideology of American exceptionalism by using these methods to dictate what students know about the history of the state.

Recently, the 1776 Commission under President Trump sought to bolster “lost cause mythology” against the 1619 Project by refuting systemic racism and serious analysis of how slavery has affected society.¹⁶⁶ We have long taught our students that the founding of the United States starts with its split from Britain because of lack of representation government. The 1619 Project argued that early slavery in Virginia set the nation’s path. The traditional lost cause myth of the Confederacy constructs an idealized version of pre-Civil War America to downplay the horrors and continuing racism that stems from enslaving African people. Historians and textbook authors, universities and our government all play a role in the creation of course curriculum and degree requirements.

These people have the power to dictate what knowledge is important for our students and what knowledge is not. The criteria on which this choice is made seems to be: How do we create a positive version of American history and yet still make minor acknowledgments for the flaws and failures that have come along the way. How do we make it seem like America is the best place in the world to live? How do we push forward a capitalist narrative that instills fear of

¹⁶⁵ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 421.

¹⁶⁶ “The 1776 - Archives.” Accessed March 23, 2021. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf>.

differing economic and political ideologies? As educators, historians, and authors of history we have to consider whom this narrative serves and what purpose and agenda they are using it to serve. Context is key when thinking about the overall goal of the master narrative. We must consider who creates these textbooks and for whom. This mythology attempts to overlook past the systemic trauma and violence that has create the foundation of our political, ideological, and social networks. Refusing to acknowledge the past events that have culminated on our present moment. None of these actions have ever been random, there has always been someone with a political, religious, or financial motive making those choices. If our students are not able to see these points in history that are often ignored it is no wonder so many people have a skewed view of American identity. Our socially accepted history is a revisionist history to the very extent of the definition.

3.6 Conclusion

The United States is a deeply problematic nation that touts phrases like “liberty and justice for all” and purports to treat everyone equally under the law.¹⁶⁷ However, a casual glance at any news site will illustrate the false nature of this statement. The juxtaposition between how peaceful protestors were treated when bringing attention to state sanctioned violence and rioters committing acts of domestic terrorism is baffling. The root of this treatment lies within the history of the United States and the way in which we program our students to think about their country. Without access to the unsettling and controversial histories of this country, our students will continue to believe and perpetuate the myth of American exceptionalism and superiority. We must create history textbooks and courses that highlight the

¹⁶⁷ Francis Bellamy, *The Pledge of allegiance*. Art Evans Productions, 1971.

past's direct impacts on the present and future. Removing Donald Trump from office will not put an end to the radicalized right-wing organizations his tenure emboldened. They have roots firmly planted in the past that will continue to allow for their proliferation if they are not addressed. Our students deserve an education that challenges their worldview and requires serious introspection and evaluation of their place within the sociopolitical hierarchy of this country. History educators have a duty to push students out of their comfort zones and confront their personal biases and investigate their origins. Including the events discussed in this chapter is one way that we can begin the work of historical decolonization.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE THEMATIC INCLUSION OF GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUALITY

4.1 Introduction

This final section is dedicated to a thematic analysis of gender, race, and sexuality throughout both volumes of Nancy A. Hewitt and Steven F. Lawson's *Exploring American Histories*. The historical master narrative typically underrepresents these three themes, overlooking women, people of color, and individuals outside of the heterosexual standards because of their difference from Eurocentric norms. This is incredibly problematic for several reasons. First, people living outside of the Eurocentric norm have always been a part of American society and culture. Second, it does a great disservice to our female students, non-binary students, students who identify with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community, and our students of color to continue to erase their history from that of the United States. Representation within the historical master narrative is imperative for the dismantlement of the colonized master narrative. Over the centuries, colonization has transformed from meaning to the physical takeover of land, culture, language, or religion. To the concept of coloniality, a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses the physical, mental, and psychological state of being. Coloniality of knowledge, history, memory, and culture deeply impact societal perceptions of individuals who are traditionally discriminated against. Educators have a responsibility to their students to end this cycle of discrimination, no matter how uncomfortable it will be for both the teacher and student.

Accurate portrayals of the history of the United States require the inclusion of the systems created to oppress women, people of color, and subaltern sexualities. These systems

intentionally preserve the traditional hierarchy of white male domination and superiority.¹⁶⁸

Neither volume of the textbooks directly addresses this, and it is precisely the inability to put a name to the issue that stifles the progress of the decolonization of the master narrative.¹⁶⁹

Without naming systems, it is incredibly difficult to examine issues, so one can begin the process of dismantling systemic oppressions. It has become increasingly clear that the traditionally accepted history of this country has been carefully cultivated to serve a specific population and uphold the ideology of American exceptionalism.

One way to begin this process is to examine and analyze the way the textbooks portray women, people of color, and individuals belonging to the LGBTQIA community. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the depiction of subaltern themes, individuals, and communities. The purpose of this investigation is to analyze and critique the characterization and rhetoric used to describe these populations. We find heteronormative, Eurocentric, and whitewashed versions of history that have come to be socially accepted. How to decolonialize and make amends? The term reparation refers to “any form of compensation, *ex gratia* payment, restitution, rehabilitation or recognition.”¹⁷⁰ One way to make such amends is to expose the failures the system of higher education has levied on our students. The upcoming generation of students has much to unlearn about the history of the United States and this work must begin immediately.

While there are many themes covered within the textbooks, I have chosen three to analyze for this project: portrayals of gender, Black Americans, and individuals of the LGBTQIA community. Current movements shaped my decision: the #MeToo Movement,

¹⁶⁸ Quijano, “Coloniality,” 177.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Pablo De Greiff, *The Handbook of Reparations* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 182.

Black Lives Matter, and publicity about the continued oppression of LGBTQIA individuals in the United States.

4.2 Racial Injustice: Cyclical Racism

I began to write the section dedicated to racial, gender, and sexuality equality on January 18th, the day we celebrate the life and accomplishments of the great civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King devoted his life's work to the dismantlement of racial prejudice and oppression through the means of non-violent actions and protest. Many of the philosophies and ideologies King introduced are still being used today in the fight against racism in the United States. In 2021, MLK Day occurred in the wake of the violent acts of domestic terrorism that rocked our nation on January 6, 2021. With less than two days before the inauguration of Joseph Biden the threat of violence from white nationalists all but shut down Washington, D.C. and most of the country is on edge anticipating the potential violence that may ensue. Many of these individuals have shifted from right-wing conservatives to fascists, neofascists, and neo-Nazis who have weaponized their fear of progress and equality. They anticipate a future in which the majority of Americans and the government will no longer tolerate their hateful and oppressive ideologies and actions.¹⁷¹ They fear an equal distribution of power to individuals they view as inferior based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or religious affiliation. On a superficial level, it does make sense why these groups would be so vehemently opposed to equality, they fear a change in the system which was designed for their supremacy.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Matthew W. Hughey, "Discourse of Decency: White Nationalists, White Antiracists, and the Criminality of Color." *Contemporary Justice Review* 18, no. 2 (December 3, 2015): 139–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2015.1025623>.

¹⁷² Hughey, "Discourse of Decency," 139-59.

Racism is a pervasive and lived experience predicated on the belief that people of color are inferior to white individuals and therefore are not deserving of the same rights and freedoms. Racism “correspond[s] to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invent, manipulates, or retires when convenient” scholars of critical race theories’ content “that race and races are products of social thoughts and relations.”¹⁷³ In a western context, Europeans and colonial Americans created the concept of race to justify the continued enslavement of Black individuals and the notions of inferiority have persisted regardless of a lack of scientific proof.

Exploring American Histories includes historical instances of racism, but never properly defines the term or connects historic examples of racism to current events. Modern slavery is alluded to when “convict leasing programs” are introduced post-Civil War but lack connection to the prison industrial complex.¹⁷⁴ Over five hundred pages later, Clinton’s anticrime law explicates that the “bill accelerated the rate of incarceration and had a disproportionate effect on African Americans and Latinos” but fails to name the prison industrial complex or the prevalence of prison labor, modern slavery allowed by the 13th amendment.¹⁷⁵ The prison industrial complex is a system that benefits from the increased incarceration in Black and Brown bodies for their cheap or unpaid labor.¹⁷⁶ Housing discrimination post-World War II is described as a problem of the time “housing discrimination *remained* prevalent in urban and suburban neighborhoods.”¹⁷⁷ Housing discrimination remains one of the most visible instances of racism

¹⁷³ Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris, *Critical Race Theory*, 21.

¹⁷⁴ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 531.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1005.

¹⁷⁶ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: New Press, 2020).

¹⁷⁷ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 857. (emphasis added)

in the modern United States.¹⁷⁸ Housing inequality is more serious than it seems on the surface, "The segregation of our metropolitan areas today leads ... to stagnant inequality, because families are much less able to be upwardly mobile when they're living in segregated neighborhoods where opportunity is absent."¹⁷⁹ The type of housing one has access to dramatically affects the life trajectory of an individual.

There is evident progress within these textbooks; however, the ideology of American exceptionalism and supremacy undercuts the evolution made by relegating such progress to single sentences within long chapters or using past tense when discussing issues that still shape racial discrimination and barriers to this day. This leads to a silence that is palpable within our history classes and notably within Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks. It would be misleading to insinuate that Hewitt and Lawson ignored racism and racial oppression within their books. In fact, it is clear that they made a conscious effort to include subaltern histories throughout their work. However, there is room for vast improvement. They imply that white supremacists, not average Americans, perpetrated much of the violence (physical and psychological) against Black Americans, which prevents discussion of racism's pervasive and often invisible nature.

Slowly activists have chipped away at the legal institutions that enforce racial segregation and oppression. However, the institutional racism that persists does so by lack of awareness and inability to comprehend the socialization of racism that each member of American society endures. This concept has been coined white fragility and is the subject of a book by the same name. White fragility, as author Robin DiAngelo defines it, is:

¹⁷⁸ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

¹⁷⁹ Terry Gross, "A 'Forgotten History' of How the U.S. Government Segregated America." *NPR*, May 3, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgotten-history-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america>.

Socialized into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we [white people] either are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in conversations about race. We consider a challenge to our racial worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people. Thus, we perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable—the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy.¹⁸⁰

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is a cultural and Civil Rights icon, considered one of the most influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and a pillar of Black history. However, despite these titles and affiliations, there is a startling lack of information on King within the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks. In fact, out of the fourteen pages that the index gives for him in the second volume, King is mentioned only anecdotally. This lack of representation extends far past him. The fight for civil rights did not end in the 1960s. A careful analysis of the index highlights a distressing lack of representation for more recent issues faced by the Black community in the United States. The prison industrial complex and the school to prison pipeline receive no space. The Black Lives Matter movement is relegated to a single paragraph.¹⁸¹ Passages about police violence against Black individuals, groups, and communities imply that racial violence is a new phenomenon. As mentioned, there is no mention of Emmett Till (even though he is referenced in the index on page 868). Rodney King and the ensuing riots in Los Angeles in response the acquittal of the officers responsible is also absent. In fact, out of the thousands of unarmed Black people killed by police or civilians only two, Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, grace the

¹⁸⁰ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 1-2.

¹⁸¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 1021.

pages of the second volume of Hewitt and Lawson’s textbook.¹⁸² According to Vox, from the year 2000 to 2015 police have killed more than 5,600 Black people. This number does not control for race of the officers involved or whether the victim was armed. This textbook includes information past the 2016 presidential election. Therefore, it is difficult to formulate a reason why it overlooks this prevalent issue.

Considering the current national discussion of racism, systemic oppression ought to be at the forefront of our history textbooks and curriculum. The students at the University of North Texas deserve a history education that helps them contextualize the present moment. Many white people, including our students, feel as if they current racial tensions we are experiencing are “coming out of nowhere” or “out of the blue.” The United States was quite literally built on racist ideology that normalized the enslavement and degradation of Black bodies. This ideology has adapted and transformed through the centuries to uphold the same basic tenants of the inferiority of subaltern bodies and the exploitation of their labor.

Noted author, professor, and anti-racism activist Ibram X. Kendi highlights in his critically acclaimed book *Stamped from the Beginning*, that racist ideas came from the need to justify racist policies, and not the inverse.¹⁸³ The history of racism in the United States, as Kendi asserts, began before white people first “discovered” what is now known as the United States. In order to justify the mass enslavement of indigenous people and the eventual trans-Atlantic kidnapping and enslaved of Africans, white society decided that there was a racial hierarchy. This hierarchy created a social system that normalized the inferiority of darker skinned

¹⁸² German Lopez, and Anand Katakam. “Interactive Map: US Police Have Killed at Least 5,600 People since 2000.” *Vox* online. Vox, December 17, 2014. <https://www.vox.com/2014/12/17/7408455/police-shootings-map>.

¹⁸³ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 17.

individuals. That system is over 300 years old and still deeply effects the political, social, and cultural policies of the United States. This hierarchy is clearly visible when we consider how police treat individuals based on their race. Dylan Roof shot and killed nine people in a South Carolina church and was subsequently brought Burger King by an officer while Roof was in jail.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, police killed Black children like Tamir Rice, Cameron Tillman, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and countless others without provocation.

There is dangerously popular belief that people who commit crimes, those suspected of committing crimes, or those who do not comply with police orders provocative violence and are therefore deserving of the outcome of those encounters. Regardless of guilt, it is not the job of the police to bring down final judgement on individuals. That is the job of the justice system. The racial component of these deadly interactions extends past the race of the victims. An NPR report suggests that since 2015 out of the “135 unarmed Black men and women shot nationwide...at least 75% of the officers were white.”¹⁸⁵ This is a telling statistic that the textbooks blatantly ignore and misrepresent. It may not have been the intention of the authors to disregard this historic oppression, but it is significant that this information can be left out of our history textbooks with little to no repercussions. If the textbooks omitted the common theme of anti-communism, students would have a difficult time contextualizing the United States’ involvement in most global conflicts of the 20th century. Without access to the history behind police violence, our students lack the context to understand the system behind police violence.

¹⁸⁴ “Charleston Shooting Suspect’s Burger King Meal Gets National Attention.” *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), June 24, 2015. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article25394389.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Cheryl W. Thompson, “Fatal Police Shootings Of Unarmed Black People Reveal Troubling Patterns.” *NPR*. January 25, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/25/956177021/fatal-police-shootings-of-unarmed-black-people-reveal-troubling-patterns>.

Racism in the twenty first century has changed dramatically from that of the previous centuries. Instead of blatant acts of public lynching, signs demarcating water fountains, and legally segregated neighborhoods the U.S. has moved on to an invisible form of racism. Modern racism develops from Jim Crow laws, the false belief that people of color are not as intelligent as their white counterparts, and a fear of a shifting racial hierarchy. *Exploring American Histories* only explicitly states that racism is still a modern problem once, “the nation faced historic burdens of racism and the increased polarization of American politics.”¹⁸⁶ As recent events have shown, this quotation is absolutely true, however the authors fail to explicate how important racism, blatant and invisible, has been to the construction and continuation of the United States. Modern racism is not anecdotal; in my opinion, it is one of the most divisive issues facing the United States this century. Learning the history behind racism, contending with its consequences, and opening a dialogue with our students is the most effective way to deconstruct racist beliefs and ultimately lead to the decolonization of U.S. history.

4.3 Gender: Where are the Women?

The history textbooks surveyed for this project include multiple sections and primary sources dedicated to women. While it is progressive to highlight specific women, events, themes, and movements dedicated to women, there is a fundamental problem with the separation of women’s history with that of the United States at large. Such a separation highlights the differentiation between the particular subject and the master narrative. Women’s history has not always been included in history textbooks and even though it is now, it is still important to close the gap between subaltern histories and the historical master narrative. This is a controversial

¹⁸⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 999.

topic and many in the field may take issue with this approach, but I feel that in order to create a cohesive, holistic master narrative for United States history textbooks and courses it is imperative to bring these discussions to the forefront of our student's minds.¹⁸⁷ They can begin to question critically why such histories have been ignored in the past, who that serves, how and why that oppression continues.

The exclusion of subaltern histories from the master narrative has shaped the way our students, and by extension, the population of the United States, thinks about this country. The late Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, stated that she often was asked the question "when will there be enough women on the supreme court?" she answered, "when there are nine." She said that "people are shocked. But there's been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that."¹⁸⁸ There is a fundamental issue with how the collective consciousness of the American people consider women, people of color, and other subaltern individuals in places of power. The unequal distribution of power in this country was not an accident. The systems in place to subjugate women, people of color, and subaltern sexualities are purposeful and many who hold power in this country today are working very hard to perpetuate this inequality.

One major oversight in the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks is the lack of discussion related to the concept on intersectional oppression. The way that we treat people: women, people of color, subaltern sexualities, and other minority groups is directly related to the roots of their historic oppression. Current stereotypes about Indigenous Americans are rooted in colonial ideas of the weak and lazy native to justify the increased import of captive Africans.¹⁸⁹ In 2021 there

¹⁸⁷ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁸⁸ Jay Croft, "10 Quotes from Ruth Bader Ginsburg." *CNN* online. Cable News Network, September 20, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/19/politics/best-ruth-bader-ginsburg-quotes-trnd/index.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 47.

are still many professional and collegiate sports teams that have bastardized Indigenous names and imagery for the sake of their team names and mascots.¹⁹⁰ These harmful stereotypes are not confined to the world of sports. Indigenous Americans “imagery has been used by the federal government to distinguish the United States from other nations and to define the nation for its citizens, by U.S. armed forces to express military might.”¹⁹¹ We see Indigenous American not as who they are, the culture they have managed to preserve over centuries of genocide, but as an example of American exceptionalism. Forcing the Indigenous from the native lands, taking away their children to be “educated,” and dismissing their right to express power over their sovereign nations. Indigenous American’s have resisted, yet still been pressured to “Americanize.” This forced assimilation is another form of cultural genocide but not recognized as so by many white Americans.

United States history education specifically overlooks Indigenous women. There is and has been an epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women in North America. There is very little information in either volume of *Exploring American Histories* about Indigenous Americans. The authors include no information about Indigenous Americans past the “Indian Reorganization Act” of 1934 except for a brief mention of the “Navajo Code Talkers in World War II.”¹⁹² This example specifically uses non-white individuals for how they serve the narrative of American exceptionalism. Indigenous women receive little dedicated page space in either volume of the textbooks despite their rich cultural and historic influence on American history.

¹⁹⁰ Arlene Hirschfelder, and Paulette F. Molin. “Stereotyping Native Americans.” Stereotyping Native Americans - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University, February 18, 2018. <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/native/homepage.htm>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 763, 79.

The only Indigenous women to be included in *Exploring American Histories* are Pocahontas and Sacagawea. Both of these women are included within the first three hundred pages of the first volume and are the only Indigenous women to be names in either volume. Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, was married to John Rolfe and eventually went to England where she died shortly after her arrival. Pocahontas has become a cultural symbol thanks to the 1995 Disney movie of the same name. There is limited information about the woman Pocahontas, she is usually portrayed not as an individual but as a symbol. Whether her actions to save John Smith from capital punishment were legitimately heroic or staged political strategy will remain up for debate indefinitely.

Many of our students grew up watching Disney movies, singing their soundtracks, and dressing up as characters. The cartoon portrayal of Pocahontas “rewrites the quintessential story of... [the] colonizers, conquering of the Americas, and in its place tells the tale of a relatively peaceful, romantic encounter between colonizers and Native Americans.”¹⁹³ The three brief references to Pocahontas in *Exploring American Histories* leave this narrative undisputed instead of contextualizing her in relation to indigenous power and alliances.¹⁹⁴ Since what we know about her comes from the records of colonizers, we will never know how Pocahontas saw herself or understood her life and experiences. We can highlight, however, that what we know about her is not necessarily an accurate reflection of her life story.

Similarly, the textbook Sacagawea becomes a willing helpmate and guide for the 1804 Lewis and Clark expedition “to document flora and fauna of the Louisiana Territory.”¹⁹⁵ While

¹⁹³ Derek T. Buescher and Kent A. Ono. “Civilized Colonialism: Pocahontas Neocolonial Rhetoric.” *Women's Studies in Communication* 19, no. 2 (1996): 153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.1996.11089810>.

¹⁹⁴ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 38, 48, 49.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

the authors do make clear that she was a slave whom a French fur trader eventually bought and married and that they joined the expedition as a couple, the rhetoric surrounding this information insinuates a level of personal autonomy that historians will never be able to verify.¹⁹⁶ It is impossible to know if Sacagawea chose to be part of Lewis and Clark's expedition party; all we know is that she was indispensable. The stories of Sacagawea and Pocahontas highlight that without directly addressing historical fallacy or inaccuracy, these historical fantasies and mythologies will continue to proliferate. Agency is essential when considering the histories of specific individuals, especially women who come from traditionally marginalized groups. Our society venerates these women without taking into consideration their personal experiences. Barring some incredible archaeological or historical discovery, we will never know how agency and bodily autonomy intersected with the histories of Pocahontas and Sacagawea. Because of this unknowable information, it is critical that our textbooks address that the knowledge that we have of specific individuals, events, and themes are based on a heavily colonized historical record.

Native and Indigenous women deserve representation within introductory history courses for a multitude of reasons. By erasing the history of these women and their agency, we ignore the historic violence they have been subjected to at the hands of white colonizers, American citizens, and their Indigenous male counterparts.¹⁹⁷ This oversight is likely the result of institutional racism, which the Urban Indian Health Institute defines as "is the process of purposely discriminating against certain groups of people through the use of biased laws or practices. Often, institutional racism is subtle and manifests itself in seemingly innocuous ways, but its

¹⁹⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 246.

¹⁹⁷ Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11–40.

effects are anything but subtle.”¹⁹⁸ Institutional racism coupled with sexism effectively ignores the history of Native women and thus makes more recent historical events difficult to understand and analyze.

Recently, a dialogue has opened to discuss the very real issue of missing and murdered indigenous women. This phenomenon is not new, there is data going back to the 1940s that highlight the violence against Indigenous women is endemic and not likely to end without serious investigation and legislative change. The Urban Indian Health Institute reports that since 1940 there have been between “800 and 1,200 homicides of Alaskan Native women” and that the state government refuses to investigate those cases because it would be “too burdensome [on the Department of Public Safety] ...[and] because it would require too many work hours to complete.”¹⁹⁹ Murder is not the only crime plaguing Indigenous women, poverty, domestic violence, rape, in urban Indigenous communities have been found to be more than 10x the national average.²⁰⁰ These investigations are new and it may be difficult to incorporate into history textbooks. However, our students will certainly have a much higher probability of understanding the current issues facing Native and Indigenous women if their histories are included within the master narrative of American history. Colonization played an enormous role in the structural changes within Native and Indigenous tribal hierarchy. While the textbooks attempt to highlight the generational violence and trauma caused by white invaders, they fall short of including information that can properly contextualize modern Indigenous communities.

Historical portrayals of Black women follow a similar and equally detrimental fashion as

¹⁹⁸ Annita Lucchesi and Abigail Echo-Hawk, “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.” *Urban Indian Health Institute*. November 14, 2008.

¹⁹⁹ Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk, “Missing and Murdered”, 15.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

their Native and Indigenous counterparts. Within the Hewitt and Lawson textbooks Black women get more page space, but there are parallel oversights that make historical contextualization problematic. Chapter 19, titled “Progressivism and the Search for Order” discusses progressive ideals, including suffrage, prohibition, progressivism and African Americans, along with other similar topics. While the authors highlighted the racism that permeated the suffrage movement, they explicitly state that the 19th amendment “grant[ed] women the vote.”²⁰¹ This statement is not only false but incredibly misleading. The 19th amendment only protects voting rights “on the basis of sex.”²⁰² There is no protection granted on the basis of race. Later, in Chapter 26, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 makes the briefest of appearances but fails to mention that this was the single piece of legislation that finally made it illegal to discriminate against people voting on the basis of race. The exact language reads “the **Voting Right Act** (emphasis original), which banned the use of literacy tests for voter registration, authorized a federal lawsuit against the poll tax (which succeeded in 1966), empowered federal officials to register disenfranchised voters, and required seven southern states to submit any voting changes to Washington before they went into effect.”²⁰³ Yet, no mention of the intersection of racial and gender discrimination made its way into the textbook.

As recently as the 2020 presidential election Black Americans are still struggling to register to vote and cast their ballots in primaries and elections. Former Georgia gubernatorial candidate and state representative, Stacey Abrams, was nominated in February of 2021 for a Nobel Peace Prize. Stemming from her work registering Black voters in Georgia prior to the

²⁰¹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 638.

²⁰² U.S. Constitution. amend. XIX, sec 1.

²⁰³ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 894.

2020 presidential election.²⁰⁴ It is popularly accepted that without this massive push to register Black voters in Georgia that Donald Trump would have won election to a second term in office. Highlighting the unbelievable importance of Black voices in the democratic process. The voices of Black Americans are incredibly powerful. So powerful that those who benefit from their oppression will spend time, effort, and money to stop them from voting.

The disenfranchisement of Black voters has been a popular tactic to maintain the racial hierarchy within the United States, specifically in the South.²⁰⁵ Led by “outspoken white suffragists...[who] contented that as long as even a fraction of black men voted and the Fifteenth amendment continued to exist, allowing southern women to vote would preserve white supremacy by offsetting black men’s votes.”²⁰⁶ The master narrative tends to erase the problematic actions of white women. While the textbooks do assert that the white suffragists of the early 20th century did not include their Black counterparts, the overall rhetoric to describe the 19th amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 fail to explain long-term consequences. It is not only important to say that an injustice took place but to contextualize the reasoning. White women in the United States had a clear reason to distance themselves from their Black, Jewish, Catholic, and indigenous counterparts. The racial hierarchy highlighted by Kendi includes a gendered aspect. Kendi asserts that “intersectionality [is] prejudice stemming from the intersections of racist ideas and other forms of bigotry, such as sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia.”²⁰⁷ Women of color, of subaltern religion, socioeconomic status, and country of origin are subjugated to an inferior status by their white counterparts because of the benefits of

²⁰⁴ Marty Johnson, “Stacey Abrams Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize.” *The Hill* online, February 1, 2021. <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/536758-stacey-abrams-nominated-for-nobel-peace-prize>.

²⁰⁵ Johnson, “Stacey Abrams,” 2021.

²⁰⁶ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 636.

²⁰⁷ Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning*, 3.

a higher position in the social hierarchy. Position on the social hierarchy is important in a society that determines worth based on one's status.

While it may be impossible to include every topic in introductory history textbooks the manner laid out in this chapter, there must be room for an emphasis on the underlying systems that created the physical, cultural, and social barriers for women, people of color, and subaltern sexualities. When our textbooks and history courses ignore the intersections of oppression that have continued to form against women of color in this country it is not difficult to understand the reasoning behind the formation and perpetuation of racial and gender prejudice. Prejudice forms from a need to maintain the racial and gender hierarchy. Kendi asserts that “hate and ignorance have not driven the history of racist ideas in America. Racist policies have driven the history of racist ideas in America. And this fact becomes apparent when we examine the causes behind, not the consumption of racist ideas, but the production of racist ideas.”²⁰⁸ The increasing need to assert white supremacy over Black bodies came from the need to maintain the social, political, economic, and physical domination. Black women have been subjected to multiple oppressions because of their race and their gender.

A discussion on systemic oppression is necessary to contextualize historical oppression and abuse. To understand how the myth of the “welfare queen” has continued we must take a metaphoric step back to examine other myths about Black women that led to the creation of this fallacy. Dispelling these myths in our history textbooks, classrooms, and ultimately, the master narrative will help create a public that faces racial and gender disparities, Black women are still three times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts.²⁰⁹ Myths about how

²⁰⁸ Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning*, 22.

²⁰⁹ “Infographic: Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths - United States, 2007–2016.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 4, 2020.

Black women feel pain or experience illness created during slavery still persist in the medical field today.²¹⁰ It is precisely the job of history textbooks and courses to explore how these ideas were created and why they continue to persist.

White supremacy is not always blatant and does not always come in the form of a white hooded figure brandishing a burning cross. White supremacy can be subtle, so much so that many still refuse to acknowledge its continued existence. Within Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks, white supremacy is synonymous with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). While such organizations certainly contribute to the blatant atmosphere of hate and fear in the United States white supremacy is a form of cultural indoctrination. The Southern Poverty Law Center labels the KKK and other affiliated organizations terrorist organizations (as did the FBI in the 1960s).²¹¹ Terrorism, hate, and violence do not always take the form of a burning cross. White supremacy is an underlying system that maintains the social hierarchical domination of whiteness. The textbooks only associate white supremacy with groups like the KKK or the alt-right movement.²¹² White supremacists are individuals who, through direct action, work to advance white culture and separate white individuals and communities from those they consider inferior based on race, religion, or sexual orientation. White supremacy, after the fall of Jim Crow and the passage and implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, took on a nuanced

<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/disparities-pregnancy-related-deaths/infographic.html>.

²¹⁰ Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation On Black Americans From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Sophie Trawalter, "Black Americans Are Systematically Under-Treated for Pain. Why?" *Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy: University of Virginia*. University of Virginia, June 30, 2020. <https://batten.virginia.edu/about/news/black-americans-are-systematically-under-treated-pain-why>.

²¹¹ "Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism." Southern Poverty Law Center, March 1, 2011. https://www.splcenter.org/20110228/ku-klux-klan-history-racism?gclid=Cj0KCCQiAvP6ABhCjARIsAH37rbRNfwuZ85293RNIPLQCO5TUFPPJRaCVg5IoyDLNUdpkOUvSJymPi0xoaAoO1EALw_wcB.

²¹² Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 531, 1026-7.

face that instituted seemingly invisible acts of oppression. Racism and discrimination are not legal but that does not mean they ceased to exist.

White supremacy has modernized and metamorphosized. It no longer looks like a “whites only” sign by a water fountain but it takes the form of segregated neighborhoods and schools.²¹³ The term “white supremacy” does not make an appearance in the first volume of *Exploring American Histories*. The second volume confines the term to specific groups and events for recent history. White supremacy is not merely racist hate groups or events of racial violence and injustice. White supremacy is the system of injustice that subjugates non-white individuals and communities to secondary status and citizenship. In this country “white-ness is invisible...because the racialized nature of politics, policing, education and every other sphere of public life is so deeply ingrained that it has become normalized – unremarked and taken for granted.”²¹⁴ Some may conflate the concept of white supremacy with that of white privilege. While the terms may seem analogous, white privilege is “the multitude of ways in which people who are identified as ‘white’ enjoy countless, often unrecognized, advantages in their daily lives.”²¹⁵ White supremacy is “an exercise of power that goes beyond notions of ‘white privilege’ and can only be adequately understood through a language of power and domination.”²¹⁶ Modern white supremacy includes KKK rallies and marches but also more subtle expressions of power and dominance that have maintained segregated schools and cities, economic stratification, and the prison industrial complex.

²¹³ Jade McClain, “Remnants of Jim Crow Found in Modern Housing Policy.” NYU, January 23, 2020. <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2020/january/modern-housing-segregation-in-america.html>.

²¹⁴ David Gillborn, “Rethinking White Supremacy.” *Ethnicities* 6, no. 3 (2006): 319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796806068323>.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

4.4 Sexuality: Contained by No Binary

Our history textbooks ought to highlight when current and historic attitudes and beliefs trace back to the first colonizers. We are still working to dismantle the stereotypes created out of fear of deviance from the norm. The first step to deconstruct the systems created to “other” queer individuals and communities is to understand where/why those systems developed in the first place. In the context of this project, othering is the “politically charged self-identification by means of distantiation from the other was further developed as the notion of othering.”²¹⁷ American society “others” are any individual or group living outside the Eurocentric, heterosexual, male norm. Queerness is more easily overlooked than race or gender because sexuality and non-cisgender identity do not necessarily physically differentiate individuals from the norm. Through the process of overlooking queer histories, these textbooks create the illusion that non-cis-heterosexual relationships and/or feelings are a new experience. While this may be unintentional, it furthers a political agenda set of reclaiming American history as that without explicitly included controversy.

It is important to acknowledge that our modern understanding and conceptualization of sexuality is relatively new and cannot retroactively fit historical individuals or communities. However, this does not mean that historians, authors, and educators should overlook or ignore the evidence of subaltern sexualities in American history. The absence of inclusion within the pages of our history textbooks does not mean that every individual who lived within the times covered by these books lived within the constraints of heteronormativity. The historical record hints at those living outside the normative sexual culture by the creation of laws and punishments

²¹⁷ Lajos Brons, “Othering, An Analysis” *Transcience, a Journal of Global Studies*. no. 6. (2015): 70.

for individuals engaging in homosexual relationships.²¹⁸

The terms “homosexuality,” “gay liberation front,” and “gay liberation movement” all appear in the index of volume two.²¹⁹ There are just over a dozen references to homosexuality within the second volume of Hewitt and Lawson’s textbook. The first mention of subaltern sexualities takes place in a paragraph about post-Victorian era “Boston marriages,” which the authors stated were sexual and non-sexual relationships and gave these “women of a certain class amount an alternative to traditional, heterosexual marriage.”²²⁰ The textbooks skip nearly fifty years before mentioning in that “homosexuals” were part of “the Nazi regime’s genocidal efforts.”²²¹ Other pages in the index attributed to homosexuality “in the Holocaust” bear no mention of the term “homosexual” or other language attributed to subaltern individuals or communities.²²² While the index states that page 785 carried information about homosexuality and World War II, this page is actually dedicated to the creation of “the military-industrial complex.”²²³ The subject of homosexuality in the military post-World War II does not make an appearance until page 864. A single brief paragraph discusses homosexuality in relation to the work of Dr. Alfred Kinsey and the formation of the “Mattachine Society” and the “Daughters of Bilitis.”²²⁴ Neither of these groups are discussed further and leave the reader in desperate want of further explanation of the queer American experience.

The next mention of homosexuality comes during the “second red scare” of the late

²¹⁸ Bronski, *A Queer History*, 25.

²¹⁹ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, I-14, I-17.

²²⁰ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 564.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 795.

²²² *Ibid.*, 796, 803.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 785.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 864.

1940s. The authors state that “some employees [of the government] were fired because they were homosexuals and were considered susceptible to blackmail by foreign agents.”²²⁵ The authors do content that “heterosexual men and women who were having extramarital affairs were not treated in the same manner,” suggesting that the treatment of homosexual government employees was not necessarily about fear of blackmail but about sociocultural norms.²²⁶ The final mentions of subaltern sexuality are in relation to “social conservatism” and the perceived threat of the gay rights movement in the 1970s.²²⁷ Next, the authors quickly move onto the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and the “New Rights... insiste[nce] that AIDS was a plague visited on sexual deviants by an angry God.”²²⁸ Although all together failing to mention the origin of the disease.

The Infamous policy of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy, implemented under the Clinton administration of the mid 90s, and its repeal under Obama in late 2011, is one of the last references to homosexuality within the second volume of *Exploring American Histories*.²²⁹ Finally, the Supreme Court Case “*Obergefell v. Hodge*” (original emphasis) of 2015 struck down the “1996 Defense of Marriage Act” legalizing gay marriage in all fifty states. The inclusion of these histories and events evidence of progress within the master narrative. However, there is much progress to be made.

The master narrative excludes queer history as a reflection of the continued sense that queer individuals are abnormal. The unquestioned assumption that everyone is heterosexual until told otherwise perpetuates heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality. The ideology of

²²⁵ Hewitt and Lawson, *Exploring American Histories*, 830.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., 966.

²²⁸ Ibid., 967.

²²⁹ Ibid., 1005, 1019.

normality is key to the concept of American exceptionalism. Thus, it is understandable why queer individuals, communities, and identities are barely included within history textbooks. After all, these textbooks set the foundation for the indoctrination of American exceptionalism.

The lack of representation for subaltern sexualities and genders within either volume of Hewitt and Lawson's textbooks is frustrating. The first volume, focusing on the colonial period to just after the end of the Civil War makes hardly any mention of sexuality of any kind. Yet, long before Eurocentrism penetrated and altered indigenous culture, people on the American continent included a range of gender roles. Myriad newspaper articles, scholarly journal articles, and other sources are simple Google searches away as "Queer Colonial America" and "Homosexuality Pre-Civil War" that recount the complex and readily available histories of queer Americans. The historical erasure of subaltern sexualities is frustratingly common. However, this does not mean that homosexuality, gender fluidity, or the numerous other expressions of sexuality and gender are new concepts developed during the sexual revolution of the 20th century.

Non-normative sexuality and gender expression have existed around the world and within the United States before the concept of this country was invented.²³⁰ Manuela L. Picq and Josi Tikuna assert in their article "Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation," that sexual colonization is a major contributing factor to the erasure of indigenous queer identities.²³¹ As colonizers settled on Native land, colonial leaders worked hard to differentiate European standards of living from that of the Indigenous. Michael Bronski asserts that, "European

²³⁰ Manuela L. Picq and Josi Tikuna, "Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation." *E-International Relations*, August 20, 2019. <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/08/20/indigenous-sexualities-resisting-conquest-and-translation/>.

²³¹ Ibid.

religious and social thought held that people who did not adhere to Christian concepts of sexual behavior, gender affect, or modesty were less than human; they were like animals. This qualified them to be deprived of individuality, liberty, and life itself.”²³² Christianity played major role in the redistribution of cultural norms. Through mass genocide, religious conversion, and cultural inhalation indigenous tribes and individuals struggled to maintain their sociocultural traditions.

Not only have queer indigenous individuals existed since before European coloniality but evidence affirms that European individuals and their decedents participated in queer relationships. Sodomy and buggary laws were common in colonial America, and while one could argue that there are many reasons for such legislation, it would be impertinent to assert consensual homosexual relationships were not part of the reasons behind them.²³³ Professor of Practice in Media and Activism in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Michael Bronski of Harvard University stated in an interview with Vice News that “despite their heterosexual aspirations, the Pilgrims found that sodomy just refused to stop happening among their ilk. Though they passed laws to encourage heterosexual marriage and reproduction, “clearly, they were fucking²³⁴ before they were married.”²³⁵ Despite the fact that the majority of queer encounters were documented when couples were arrested or punished, this is legitimate evidence of homosexual relationships in the colonial United States. It is impossible to speak to the extent of these relationships. Ignoring queer histories subjugates them but does not remove them from

²³² Bronski, *A Queer History*, 2.

²³³ Margot Canaday, “We Colonials: Sodomy Laws in America.” *The Nation*, June 29, 2015. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/we-colonials-sodomy-laws-america/#:~:text=During%20the%201600s%2C%20the%20American,part%20of%20its%20sodomy%20prohibition>

²³⁴ Original language used by the author. I chose to use the actual word in an academic setting due to using an exact quotation from previous author

²³⁵ Matt Baume, “The Pilgrims Were Queer.” *VICE*, November 27, 2017. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vb3w7a/the-pilgrims-were-queer>.

existence. Exposing the historical erasure of non-normative sexuality will create a space within our textbooks, curriculum, and classroom to discuss the purpose of avoiding and omitting queerness from the master narrative.

From the lack of queer representation within Hewitt and Lawson's textbook arises a question: what is the purpose of historical erasure of queer persons and experiences? History textbooks uphold the hegemonic and Eurocentric values expressed within cultural norms. In the United States, norms value whiteness, heterosexuality, and maleness. These values are being challenged and questioned in mainstream American society but have thus far not permeated the undergraduate history textbooks. Progress is often made at the expense of comfort. The history of sexuality in the United States is complicated; peppered with violence, discrimination, murder, and religious oppression against people who identify outside of normative sexuality and gender categories. It can be uncomfortable to many students, educators, and authors to learn about the history and experiences of people who live outside of historic sociocultural gender and sexuality norms. The incorporation of theory is essential to create an educational environment that fosters learning and stigmatization. These histories can be tragic but also highlight the incredible strength that groups and individuals have maintained through generations and so many attempts to eradicate their existence.

In order to honor the past, we must experience the discomfort and knowledge that our historical and contemporary societal norms have dehumanized, murdered, and oppressed people living outside gender and sexuality norms. This can be challenging for individuals to confront, especially if they believe in exclusive norms or that social constructs like homophobia can be dismantled individually. Homophobia is a systemic sociocultural phenomenon what requires

structural change, the kind of change that must take place in our classrooms and history textbooks.

Just as race and racism were created to justify the enslavement of Africans, cisgender/transgender and heterosexual/homosexual binaries draw sharp contrasts between what is considered socially acceptable and unacceptable.²³⁶ The exploration of queer histories is a controversial subject for many reasons. Considering that categories like gay, lesbian, queer, etc. are relatively new terminology it would be irresponsible to comb the historical record looking for individuals to label. Beth Kelly, vice president of Education, Research and Historical Interpretation for Colonial Williamsburg states that “human beings who operate outside of sexual and gender expectations have always existed within and contributed to our history...[and] sharing this history is vital if we are committed to telling a holistic narrative of our past.”²³⁷ In 2019 Colonial Williamsburg created a committee dedicated to “research the history of gender and sexually nonconforming people,”²³⁸ highlighting that expanding the master narrative necessitates “expanding our notions of human relationships and the complexity of human behavior.”²³⁹ Regardless of the necessity of projects such as this, research into the history of queer individuals and communities is still highly controversial.

Education is key to ending discrimination against the LGBTQIA community. The erasure of queer individuals, communities, and experiences from the historical record is symptomatic of American culture. Mainstream America has ignored people who threaten the status quo, unequal

²³⁶ Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 25.

²³⁷ Samantha Schmidt, “Like Chasing Shadows!: Uncovering Colonial Williamsburg's LGBTQ History.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, November 16, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/11/16/like-chasing-shadows-uncovering-colonial-williamsburgs-lgbtq-history/>.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

distribution of power, wealth, and the social hierarchy. Religious minorities in the United States have long dictated sociocultural norms for everyone based on their specific religious teachings. Many of these teaching revolve around a gender binary that requires heterosexual relationships and strictly punishes those who do not conform. While the textbooks do not explicitly express this religious dogma, they follow a similar and distinct pattern of ignorance that can no longer be overlooked. Religious oppression may not be intentional and still contribute to a prevalent issue that U.S. society collectively faces. Religious teachings, specifically Christian dogma, permeate aspects of secondary and post-secondary education that seem innocuous until further investigation. High school health classes in many states require abstinence only education in high school and are required to dole out inaccurate and dangerous information about abortion and other forms of birth control.²⁴⁰ According to Planned Parenthood, “only 9 states currently require discussion of LGBTQ identities and relationships to be inclusive and affirming” while “7 Southern states either prohibit educators from discussing (or even answering questions about) LGBTQ identities and relations, or actually require sex educators to frame LGBTQ relationships negatively”²⁴¹ These laws and requirements have come under fire because of the blatant and obvious discrimination.

Although this project does not focus on high school education it is important to highlight that student who attend public high school in Texas are not being exposed to the truth about the history of this country and that is unlikely to change once they reach a public university. In fact, the chair of the Texas State Board of Education, Keven Ellis, has not formal

²⁴⁰ “Sex Education Laws and State Attacks.” Planned Parenthood Action Fund. Planned Parenthood. Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/sex-education/sex-education-laws-and-state-attacks>.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

educational training and hold a doctorate in Chiropractic Medicine.²⁴² There is immense political oversight in the textbook curation and publication process for high school. History education is highly political and influenced by the political and religious leanings of those in charge of oversight. This is abundantly clear through the lack of queer histories and representation within the textbooks required at the University of North Texas. Queer representation is still highly controversial, one of the most effective methods to avoid confrontation is to skirt around the topic all together. Societally, we are used to having these histories omitted, so much so that fighting for their inclusions can be surprising and considered political. The previous Vice President, Michael Pence, was an advocate for gay conversion therapy and avidly opposed to marriage equality, he used his faith to justify these positions.²⁴³ The marriage of religion and politics has wormed its way into education in such manner that the dissolution of such a bond is considered an attack on religious and political ideology. Education, religion, and politics have become so intertwined that the removal of religion and politics from education is seen as an attack on specific political and religious beliefs. Neutrality cannot exist in a system that is overseen by those with a vested interest in the specifically curated outcome of education.

4.5 Conclusion

Racism, homophobia, and gender discrimination are learned behaviors and belief systems, deeply ingrained in our sociocultural structure, hierarchy, and psyche. Each of these systems was created to further perpetuate the social, economic, and cultural hierarchy put in place to justify the disenfranchisement of women, people of color, and subaltern sexualities.

²⁴² “SBOE Member District 9.” Texas Education Agency. Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/leadership/state-board-of-education/sboe-board-members/sboe-member-district-9>.

²⁴³ “A Timeline of Mike Pence's Discrimination Against the LGBT Community.” Indiana Democratic Party, December 18, 2019. <https://www.indems.org/a-timeline-of-mike-pences-discrimination-against-the-lgbt-community/>.

Although integral to the conception and continuation of the United States, the textbooks' series of isolated events fails to communicate the underlying systemic nature of each ideology. Each of these systems creates and maintains the distinct social and economic hierarchy that places white, heterosexual men in positions of authority that allows for the continued abuses against subaltern groups for economic and political advancement of those in power.

Racism, sexism, and homophobia have been able to maintain a level of anonymity and invisibility because of their controversial nature. These subjects are not completely ignored but sidelined in a manner that detaches the systemic nature of such oppression from the historical master narrative. The creation of such a void between master narrative and subaltern identity divorces the two and creates parallel narratives that only converge in a specific set of circumstances and events. While the historical narrative of subaltern groups is certainly more visible in recent history they have always existed in the United States. A reexamination of the historical record through the frames of intersectionality, critical race theory, and decoloniality clearly highlights this fact.

Critically understanding how the current master narrative and those of subaltern groups interact is imperative to the decolonization of United States history. The history of the United States cannot be accurately portrayed in a progressive linear fashion. The history of the United States is inundated with controversy and conflict that does not reflect kindly on our current state of affairs. Instead, a carefully crafted teleological narrative has been created to uphold the values of American exceptionalism and superiority. The disguise of uncomfortable histories holds real world consequences for our students. This history they are taught carefully crafts an idealized version of the United States that diffuses blame onto other countries, religions, and subaltern groups for issues within the United States. These issues, many discussed above, are roadblocks

that our students will or already have begun to face. Women, people of color, queer, trans, and non-binary students deserve to see their histories incorporated within the master narrative.

Exclusion from the master narrative will only continue to foster exclusion and division within the social makeup of the United States.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary: The Significance of History Education

This thesis argues for teaching citizenship by discontinuing the practice of using history education to indoctrinate students into American mythology. Patriotism has become hyper-politicized and created a dichotomous relationship, effectively creating two factions of Americans. Those who oppose and uphold the status quo both argue from history. The mainstream, though, believes unequivocally that the United States serves as the example of democratic leadership throughout the world because “in this liberal world view, the United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian governments of “Europe” and presented to the world an example of liberty for others to emulate.”²⁴⁴ This myth requires a progressive linear narrative of U.S. history. Those who require the myth take any critique of tradition or their concept of individual freedom as an attack not only on the U.S., but also on their personal liberties.

It has become clear throughout the process of creating this thesis that history education is more critical than I could have imagined when I began last this project. The purpose of an education rooted in the history of the United States is to create future generations of citizens who understand how their culture and society formed and the repercussions and consequences of these underlying systems. In order to achieve this purpose, our history education textbooks, and curriculum must move past traditional taught events, individuals, and themes to incorporate the subaltern. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of previously ignored figures, events, and themes will

²⁴⁴ Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History.” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (1991): 1031. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2164993>.

come at the cost of the ideology of American exceptionalism. A nation that continues to learn from the mistakes of the past can create a “more perfect union.”²⁴⁵

As the previous chapters have illustrated, it is possible to create history textbooks that confront aspects of our collective past previously only viewed through rose-colored glasses. The United States is an enigma. Founded on the ideals of freedom and liberty, by men holding people in bondage, leaders who had a very narrow definition of who qualified for said freedom and liberty. The contrary nature of the founders cultivated a historical narrative rife with serious and longstanding consequences. As we comb back through the historical records it is not difficult to visualize the ebb and flow of events, ideologies, and individuals that begin to repeat themselves every few generations. These cycles are important to the construction and maintenance of the collective American experience because they show us how we differ from our global counter parts.

American exceptionalism is not confined to history books; it is a philosophy indoctrinated into the youth of this country in overt and subtle forms. Whether it be reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in school, or singing the National Anthem before sporting events, we all experience forms of indoctrination, although we may not see it as such. The United States was built on the dichotomy of righteousness at the expense of humanity, purporting freedom for all but only including a select few. Over time, the category of “all” expanded conditionally to include women and people of color born in the United States. Immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers still experience incredible challenges to find a pathway to citizenship. The United States has become a more inclusive country from where it started in 1776, but many of the issues created during the founding of this country still plague us today. Racism, xenophobia, sexism,

²⁴⁵ U.S. Constitution. Preamble.

and homophobia have continually transformed and in some cases, become invisible to those unaffected. Bolstered by the inaccuracies and exclusions of events that highlight the failures, systemic issues, and continued oppression of the United States it is unsurprising that people in this country conceptualize this country based on their race, socioeconomic status, religion, sexuality, and gender.

The first main chapter of this project is dedicated to three presidents who defined the periods in which they were in power. Washington was the first president of the United States and often credited as the “best” or “most influential” president. Yet, his personal life is rarely mentioned. Washington’s status as a wealthy plantation owner allowed him the political and financial freedom to be a successful general and president. Lincoln, often touted as the great emancipator, expressed very public racist beliefs and was not concerned with ending slavery until it was the means to preserve the union. Reagan established economic policies that only furthered the class divide and paved the way for the serious issues of the modern economy. Textbook authors left out specific and important details that would allow for more detailed contextualization of these men for our students.

The legacies of historic individuals like Washington, Lincoln, and Reagan have helped create the heroification of historic individuals. Promoting American exceptionalism means forgetting or ignoring many, if not all, of their negative qualities and actions. The inability to recognize the humanness of our leaders creates the heroification of not only historic individuals, but also of current political figures. Heroification is dangerous as it distorts the reality of our nation’s complicated and troubled past assuming an idealized version of important historical figures and events that directly counteracts the purpose of teaching United States history. Grappling with our violent and unjust past is not an easy or pleasant experience for most

students. However, showing the purpose heroification serves within the master narrative directly connects our past and present because it exposes how people built systems to create continuing social, economic, race, and gender hierarchy. Seeing the irony of founders who professed every man's right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" while simultaneously denying those basic rights to thousands of Africans exploited for their labor lays a basic understanding of the power hierarchy that will help our students understand better the similarities between modern and historical government. Current members of congress create legislation or interpret the constitution based on personal interest and financial motivation.

The second chapter details events about subaltern groups that the textbooks either skim over or completely overlook. These events are emblematic of recurring themes of racial violence and imperialism. The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and the 1985 bombing of MOVE in Philadelphia encapsulate alternative ways to recognize racial violence. Black Americans have experienced immense trauma that has characterized not only the histories of individuals and communities but also the lived experiences of people today. These specific events are important because they are examples of extreme violence against people of color that have traditionally gone unnoticed but are examples of underlying systemic racism, xenophobia, anti-communist sentiment.

Multiple, serious issues arise when such events are overlooked. First, without the inclusion of major acts of recent violence against Black communities, textbooks create a false sense of racial harmony that specific events like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s disrupted. Instead of creating the foundation for systemic racism, the textbooks create segments of racial violence, inequality, and injustice. The brief mention of racial violence post World War I does not do enough to explicate fully the extent of the violence Black Americans experienced

and continue to experience. It is important to interrogate which events of racial violence are included comparatively with those excluded. There is a purpose behind the inclusion of specific events over others. The event included, Chicago (red summer?), was significantly less violent than the Tulsa Race Massacre. The Tulsa Race Massacre is also an example of the destruction of Black financial success by murdering people and destroying an entire economic infrastructure. Black Tulsan's created thriving businesses divorced from white Tulsan's and were living much better lives compared to many other Black southerners.

It is important to note that with much of the racial violence no governing body rectified by any of the destruction of property. Not only were white mobs intent on violent destruction of Black bodies, but of their financial independence. This speaks to the necessity of financial inferiority to white supremacy. In order to justify the oppression of Black Americans it is important to justify their dependence on financial support from the government. This was true during Reconstruction and now. The myth of the welfare queen popularized by Reagan is still used against people of color, specifically, Black women. Thus, it is important to look beneath the surface of violent events to understand the holistic nature of their consequences.

In 1985, the city of Philadelphia bombed a Black neighborhood. As discussed previously, there was a history of violence between the city and the MOVE organization, the fire department allowed the fire to burn uncontained, which destroyed the entire neighborhood. Once again, white authorities' actions put a Black neighborhood in dire financial straits with no restitution until the beginning of the 21st century. This event has all but been erased from the historical record, not just in the textbooks analyzed for this project, but from historical memory. This event took place within living memory and yet people who were adults in 1985 did not have knowledge of the bombing. The exclusion of this is not an accident. The exclusion of the

bombing of an American city by the American municipal government is an incredible oversight. It speaks to how we treat Black individuals and groups that the local, state, or federal government deems threatening.

In his famous “Letters from Birmingham Jail” Martin Luther King, Jr. asserted that “freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”²⁴⁶ Many who have never felt the sting of oppression of injustice assert, “Violence is not the answer,” or use other forms of gaslighting to discredit the Black experience in America. The absurd assertion that outlawing racism and discrimination has created an equal society fails to recognize the transformation of tactics of racism, discrimination, and oppression. These systems of white supremacy have moved from a visible public platform to one of invisible oppression. There has never been a peaceful revolution in the history of the United States. Media often portrays Black individual or communities’ violence as destructive but understands white violence as an act of protection or defensive violence. The Tulsa Race Massacre is a perfect example of this phenomenon. The end of slavery came at the expense of the Civil War, the women’s suffrage movement was often incredibly violent, and The Civil Rights Movement integrally entailed violence against Black American’s sitting at lunch counters, riding busses, or marching in the streets. Violence is an American tradition, especially when it has targeted subaltern communities.

The CIA endorsed and funded 1954 Guatemalan Coup d’état is a singular example of the global nature of American history. The United States has asserted itself into a position of international authority that focuses on policing the political and economic forces in countries we

²⁴⁶ Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” African Studies Center. University of Pennsylvania. Accessed March 15, 2021. https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

can dominate with little or no consequences. Guatemala is not the only country that United States capitalist interests victimized. There are dozens more in the historical record. The erasure of these events tells us a great deal about how we wish to be perceived as a benevolent nation working hard to overthrow governments deemed dangerous because access to cheap resources are threatened. The American savior complex only further bolsters the narrative of American exceptionalism. The government has used military supremacy to protect access to foreign resources that we have no right to exploit. This is the case with the 1954 coup in Guatemala and in so many other countries around the world.

The myth of the United States as the global peacemaker is deeply entrenched within the collective American psyche. We consider ourselves an ethical, moral, and technological step above countries like Guatemala and thus are emboldened to destabilize their economies for our economic and political gains. Americans ignore these violations until (and even after) we begin to feel the negative consequences of our actions. The current migration crisis at the southern border directly links to U.S. involvement in Central America. It is for reasons such as this that it is vitally important that our students learn the complex and controversial history of their country. Without proper context, the destabilization of the Northern Triangle of Central America does not seem like an issue created by the United States. Many of our students do not know or understand the historical chain of events that have resulted in the exodus of Central Americans who have fled violence, poverty, and environmental degradation caused in large part by the United States.

The third chapter is dedicated to tracing and investigating subaltern themes and communities. The purpose is to examine critically the ways in which women, people of color, and the LGBTQIA community are othered despite their expanded inclusion within the textbooks and master narrative. This study highlights that increased presence of subaltern

communities within the textbooks does not directly translate to increased discussion on systemic issues plaguing these communities. *Exploring American Histories* typically only discusses subaltern communities when they have a direct relationship with the majority. Subaltern communities have been marginalized for centuries. Women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA communities have existed in the United States since its beginning. These people have existed in spite of the violence and oppression pushed on them from the majority. They have preserved their culture and histories despite how hard the majority has worked to destroy these important identities. To honor the histories of subaltern individuals properly we must work to separate and detangle their experiences from that of the majority and pay homage to the systemic oppression created to maintain the sociocultural hierarchy.

Creating counter historical narratives that highlight the creation and consequences of systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia will help our students contextualize current events. Ongoing police violence against people of color and continued attempts to marginalize the LGBTQIA community are historic examples of current events. I was deeply naïve to the history of police violence in the United States until I began to engage with Black Lives Matter content on social media well after I entered my undergraduate studies. My own experience with United States history education woefully underprepared me to participate with the political system and left me without a basic understand of the foundation of my home country. An individual's family, social circle, and on a larger scale society frame their experience and interpretation of the world. We see only what we are shown until we learn to look under the surface and examine. The purpose of an education in history is to learn and hone skills of critical thinking and observing. While our textbooks are not the sole resource our students will use during their history courses it is imperative that these foundational texts include the complex and

controversial individuals, events, and themes that have led the United States to our current state of existence.

In my experience working with undergraduate students at the University of North Texas, many students consider HIST 2610 and 2620 to be at the bottom of their list of scholastic priorities. Some do not find the subject intellectually stimulating, and others have professed boredom. Most are simply going through the motions to fulfil these state and university requirements. Courses often do not challenge our student's worldviews; they are not learning to view the past as an extension of their lived experiences. If the purpose of an education in the history of the United States is to create well informed residents of this country it is important to introduce our students to previously unknown concepts, ideologies, and theories so they may go out into the world equipped to interpret, question, and conceptualize their worldly experiences and that of others.

Many of our students will experience the privilege of learning about racism, sexism, and homophobia instead of contending with the lived experience. For those who grew up without experiencing systemic oppression it may be difficult to understand these phenomena without background context. The intrinsic nature of oppression is the overwhelming belief that because it is no longer socially acceptable or legal to discriminate, (unless one is transgender in many states) that the historical struggles associated such discrimination no longer exists. Then explanations for the high percentage of incarcerated of Black men become laziness, family dynamics, even biodeterminism rather than systemic oppression through educational disparities, healthcare inequality, poor housing, low paying jobs, or increased policing in Black neighborhoods. Victim-blaming protects individuals in positions of privilege and power.

Although instructors at the University of North Texas must use *Exploring American*

Histories until the contact with the publisher expires in 2023, access to a new Reader of primary sources can help to combat the inadequacies and omissions of the current and perhaps future textbook. Some instructors utilize outside sources such as podcasts, documentaries, articles, and alternative print sources. The integration of outside resources allows instructors to customize their student's educational experience. Multiple forms of media may also help to engage students who struggle with traditional reading assignments. Many professors at the University of North Texas already incorporate outside sources within their courses; the diversification of sources is important for the creation of a holistic course. However, the instructor's access to authority and respect from students is a mitigating factor in adding information that counters national myths. Some instructors who already have marginalized identities by race, gender, and young age are wary of backlash from students if they include information that contradicts the textbook's authority.²⁴⁷

Ultimately, the history of the United States is long, complex, and painful. Moving forward from our past and creating a society based on equity and justice requires the recognition of formative national systems. Slavery, capitalism, and white supremacy created this nation and continue to be our social, cultural, political, and economic backbone. These systems have transformed with the rise of technology, legal changes, and the enfranchisement of previously marginalized groups. This progress is important and must be properly contextualized. Black Americans have the legal right to vote but voter suppression in Black areas is extreme. Women are still fighting for wages that equal their male peers, and queer individuals are still liable to

²⁴⁷ Personal conversation with Dr. Clark A. Pomerleau, March 13, 2021.

lose their jobs or homes because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁴⁸ We modern Americans may not be responsible for the physical conquering and colonializing of subaltern communities, but we are responsible for perpetuating the systems that created such an injustice society in which the few benefit from the suffering of the many. The way that we do this is contextualize to those who created this country and those who fought to change it.

Much of the complex and uncomfortable is excluded from history and the reintroduction is likely to cause controversy. As is evident by recent events, such as the fight to remove confederate war memorials, culturally dominant groups struggle to take responsibility for the actions of their ancestors and the continued perpetration of systemic oppression.²⁴⁹ Removing relics of oppressive heritage can create confusion within the minds of those identities revolve around the hero-worship of ancestors. The attitude surrounding removing the monuments is tense, many people do not feel they are responsible for the actions of those who came before them and the unconscious fear that removing monuments will result in the loss of perceived status. Given the “1776 Project” against the “1619 Project,” similar attitudes follow the inclusion of histories that create a narrative counter to that of American exceptionalism.

The recognition and acceptance of the United States’ violent and oppressive past should make our students uncomfortable and question their understanding of American history. Growth and progress do not spring from propaganda. If our history education is to reflect American reality accurately, it ought to cause discomfort and reconsideration of one’s reality. American exceptionalism is a dangerous ideology that dismisses the historical and lived experiences of

²⁴⁸ Elise Gould, Jessica Schieder, Kathleen Geier “What Is the Gender Pay Gap and Is It Real?: The Complete Guide to How Women Are Paid Less than Men and Why It Can't Be Explained Away.” *Economic Policy Institute*, October 20, 2016. <https://www.epi.org/publication/what-is-the-gender-pay-gap-and-is-it-real/>.

²⁴⁹ Colleen Walsh, “Historian Puts the Push to Remove Confederate Statues in Context.” *Harvard Gazette*, (Cambridge, MA), June 19, 2020. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/06/historian-puts-the-push-to-remove-confederate-statues-in-context/>.

subaltern individuals and communities. The belief in American supremacy and excellence without considering the problematic past and present of this country further contributed to the narrative of coloniality. The United States is not exempt from the responsibility of the actions of our predecessors. Regardless of intent or direct action, our students must receive an education rooted in truth and the theoretical frameworks required to do so. The belief of a teleological linear narrative of history creates the appearance of the dismantlement of systems that are still very much a part of American society and culture.

5.2 Recommendations

In order to combat inadequacies and omissions in *Exploring American Histories* and similar textbooks, instructors should consider supplementing with lectures that decolonize the master narrative and with outside sources. Alternative print primary sources and articles and the integration of outside resources such as podcasts and documentaries will allow instructors to customize their student's educational experience. Multiple forms of media may also help to engage students who struggle with traditional reading assignments. Many professors at the University of North Texas already incorporate outside sources within their courses. Professors face student disinterest in the subject of United States history. Cultivating course material to highlight the connection between history and our students may help quell this problem.

Unfortunately, many of our students have grown up believing that history is boring or that it has nothing to do with their lives. It is up to this generation of educators to change this mindset and reframe the importance of history education.

More analysis is required to create a holistic understanding of United States history education across the country. Educational requirements differ from state to state and emphasis on particular events, individuals, and themes are likely to vary drastically. Time and resource

confined this project. Future work could focus on collecting a sample from multiple public universities across Texas, and possibly the country. International resources may be able to shed light on the global implications and conceptions of American history.

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