



2020

The (mis)education About Enslavement: The Portrayals of Enslavement in 3rd Through 5th Grade Social Science Curriculum

Sondrea Singleton

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Singleton, Sondrea, "The (mis)education About Enslavement: The Portrayals of Enslavement in 3rd Through 5th Grade Social Science Curriculum" (2020). *Master's Theses*. 4377.

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/4377

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 2020 Sondrea Singleton

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE (MIS) EDUCATION ABOUT ENSLAVEMENT:
THE PORTRAYALS OF ENSLAVEMENT IN 3RD THROUGH
5TH GRADE CURRICULUM

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

SONDREA A. SINGLETON

CHICAGO, IL

DECEMBER 2020

Copyright by Sondrea A. Singleton, 2020
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Phillippo, thank you for taking a meeting with me before I was a student in the program. Your kindness, gentleness, patience, and passion has fueled me in ways I thought were unimaginable. Dr. Wells, thank you for showing me what I am capable of. Thank you for allowing me to use your home as my library. Mom and Dad, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for supporting my journey and the costly nights at Starbucks that seemed endless.

Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.

-Toni Morrison

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| ABSTRACT | vi |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| The Research Problem | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW | 6 |
| Race in Curriculum | 6 |
| Cultural Memory | 8 |
| Curriculum Policy | 11 |
| Critical Race Theory | 13 |
| Conceptual Framework | 16 |
| Afro-Pessimism | 16 |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY | 20 |
| Data Collection | 21 |
| Data Analysis | 22 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS | 25 |
| Afro-Pessimistic Themes in Curriculum | 26 |
| Political Instability | 26 |
| Homogeneity and Starvation | 27 |
| Messages Communicated About the Enslaved | 29 |
| Policy as an Enabler of American Exceptionalism in Curriculum | 31 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS | 35 |
| Implications | 35 |
| Conclusions | 38 |
| APPENDIX A: FIGURES | 40 |
| REFERENCE LIST | 42 |
| VITA | 45 |

ABSTRACT

It is no secret that America's history is one that reflects participation in chattel slavery in 1619. What is untold is the ways in which that part of America's past is reflected in curriculum. The question guiding this research is, "How is enslavement portrayed in 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum?" to better understand the portrayals, representations, and messages communicated about enslavement to young learners. This research is a qualitative exploration of the ways in which enslavement is portrayed in 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum by two of the most widely used publishing companies, McGraw Hill and Pearson. This content analysis of enslavement is guided by Afro-Pessimism as a conceptual framework. The findings reflect consistent themes of Afro-Pessimism, American exceptionalism, and curriculum policy as an enabler of exceptionalism in curriculum.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

There is very little to no representation of African Americans as key contributors to this country's prosperity in K-12 social studies curricula. Historically, social studies curriculum has ascribed second-class citizenship to African Americans due to their inability to gain agency after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Additionally, second-class citizenship is ascribed to African Americans through the misconception that the enslaved were content with their circumstance and the aftermath of enslavement (King, 2014). This narrative of African Americans was not disputed until African American Social Scientists created Black and African American history books to directly address these claims and provide further evidence that African Americans were resistant, resilient, and rebellious against systems of enslavement (King, 2014).

The problem lies within the current structure the portrayal of enslavement in social science curriculum. That is, the portrayal of enslavement in America has not changed much. Instead of racism being addressed as a system, racism in textbooks is glossed over as individual acts committed by bad people (Brown & Brown, 2010). Social studies curriculum has failed to directly address the violence America has inflicted onto African Americans during enslavement, but social studies curriculum does not fail at promoting American exceptionalism regarding historical events that have shaped contemporary times. The ways in which African Americans

engage with social studies curriculum is interconnected to their socio-historical experiences in America. Some would argue the representation of the realities of enslavement of African Americans in social studies curriculum compared to their socio-political experiences is accurate: invisible, impalpable, unimportant. On the other hand, others would argue that social studies curricula content does reflect the progress that African Americans have made since emancipation (Watkins, 2006), but continues to ignore the accuracy of the system of enslavement and its aftermath.

Oftentimes African Americans are introduced to themselves in social studies curriculum as enslaved human beings or as property. That is to say, social science curriculum implicitly states that the value and purpose of African Americans in America is for the betterment of the economy, or in other words, labor. For students who are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn, per the Illinois Learning Standards, one can begin to understand how the introduction of a racial group as property to serve the purpose of performing labor for others is problematic.

Students learn to see themselves as people and as citizens of democracy through pieces of curriculum. Elementary school is where students begin the journey of socialization and students begin to become aware of their racial identities (Lewis, 2003). The socialization aspect of schooling comes through play and other areas, but racial identity formation comes from a multitude of experiences. One that is often overlooked is the representations of race in curriculum. Early education for students is set up to ensure that as they progress educationally, they are obtaining and demonstrating the skills that are needed to function as citizens in society (Piper, 2015). One strategy that directly plays a role in the success of this aspect of socialization is affirming students in curriculum. The pedagogical practices and social studies curriculum

needs to be multicultural by means of increasing African American visibility to reaffirm African American students' identities, experiences, and positions in society. Student engagement is the key in successfully transitioning students from learning to read to reading to learn. Piper argues multicultural curriculum is the foundation for student engagement and the crux of achievement for African American students.

The 3rd through 5th grades are when students are expected to demonstrate the ability to recall important and explicit information from texts, according to the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) (Herrera, 2005). That is to say, students in those grade levels are expected to demonstrate that they have made the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Not only are students assessed on these skills, they are expected to use them to interact with academic and non-academic materials demonstrating that they are identifying key ideas and can appropriately engage moving forward. The point is for students to be able to grasp important information (Herrera, 2005), so it is critical that the curriculum is interrogated in ways that expose the American exceptionalism, implicit bias, and racism that is embedded in social studies lessons about United States' history for the sake of developing and maintain students' critical thinking skills. Using these grades to analyze elementary school social science curriculum allows insight on the foundation of critical thinking skills and knowledge obtained by students before the transition to upper primary grades, high school, and higher education where they are introduced to and expected to critically engage with humanities, world history, and geography.

Schools are sites of socialization for students and curriculum begins to mold their ideas about the world around them and who they are. Racial identity formation for African American students is about commonalities and shared experiences with history. Racial identity formation means more than identifying with physical appearance (Harper, 2007). That is to say, whilst

students are retaining information that guides them on being citizens of democracy, they are also doing the work of forming their racial identities. If African American students are searching for an identity that is based on a collective experience and “common racial heritage” (p. 3), then the introduction of their racial heritage as enslaved human beings renders challenges as they begin to form their identities and seek cultural connections to curriculum.

To this point, theorized by W.E.B DuBois, African Americans begin to develop a double consciousness as they begin to conceptualize what it means to be American and not American (Bruce, 1992). What this means for African American youth is they begin to understand the lack of social mobility, structural and educational barriers, and social inequalities due to how they are introduced to their racial heritage, or lack thereof, in curriculum. All of which impacts their relationship with schooling and education (Chavous et al., 2003). As a result, African American students use these experiences to engage with their studies more critically or reject schooling as a form of resistance (Chavous et al., 2003).

This research study is a qualitative content analysis of 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum content published by McGraw-Hill and Pearson. The focus of this study is to contextually analyze how the history of enslavement in America is portrayed in social science curriculum that is taught in public schools. The motive behind this study is to increase educators’, students’, researchers’, and parents’ awareness of the content that plays a role in shaping the schooling experiences of African American students. This research is guided by the main research question that is, How is enslavement portrayed in 3rd through 5th grade social studies curriculum?. Afro-Pessimism is the conceptual framework used to critically engage with 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum in this study. Afro-Pessimism as the conceptual framework provides a deeper more nuanced understanding to the foundation of Western

perceptions and portrayals of Africa and African Americans. The literature review aims to support readers with understanding race and curriculum through three bodies of literature, which are cultural memory, curriculum policy, and critical race theory. The methods portion of this study provides readers with details of data collection and data analysis. The findings section provides concrete support to the major research question in addition to the sub research questions that were asked during this study. Lastly, the discussion, implications, and conclusion section tackle the crux of the findings provided from content published by McGraw-Hill and Pearson.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Race in Curriculum

There is very little known about enslavement in primary grade social science texts. The bodies of literature used below are ways writers engage with literature surrounding social science curriculum and race. The themes the writers used are also tools that helped them further understand how enslavement is portrayed in curriculum. The three bodies of literature of cultural memory, curriculum policy, and critical race theory all showcase the portrayals of enslavement in social studies curriculum from different viewpoints that all correspond with one or more aspects of Afro-Pessimism.

These three bodies of literature directly shape and impact the ways in which curriculum is written and published. Analyzing texts from the theme of cultural memory will allow me to compare the portrayal of enslavement between the publishing companies McGraw Hill and Pearson all while looking for accuracy in the ways in which the two companies present the history of enslavement in social studies curriculum. From an Afro-Pessimistic framework, the theme of cultural memory serves the purpose of critically interrogating the accuracy of the Western's world view of the continent of Africa and how those views shape and re-shape America's role in chattel slavery. Specifically, from an Afro-Pessimistic perspective, cultural memory as a theme in reviewing literature is particularly important because it allows room in the analysis to examine the justification of the ways in which Africans and African Americans are

portrayed in the media, or this case, curriculum. Cultural memory as a theme allows the contextual analysis to include any mention of American accountability in the system of enslavement.

Using a critical race approach to reviewing literature from the perspective of Afro-Pessimism is vital to understanding the ways in which the Western world has placed an assumption of homogeneity onto African Americans. Here it is important to note that Western refers to the white heterosexual patriarchal view. Though critical race theory was birthed from law scholars, Afro-Pessimism argues that race is the foundation in the explanation of the social inequalities that African Americans faced during and after enslavement. Highlighting race in this analysis is pertinent in examining the verbiage being used to describe the enslaved, their conditions, and the aftermath. Furthermore, not eliminating race will allow this analysis to bring more awareness to the themes of white exceptionalism and white superiority that are present in social science curriculum that surrounds historical movements in American's history.

As American schooling developed and became what it is today, curriculum policies have also shape shifted to best fit the educational standards. Curriculum policy is a very important theme in an analysis of education because it provides historical context to contemporary circumstances. Federal, state, and local level policies influence the representations of African Americans in social science curriculum. The ever changing policies structured towards standardized testing has devalued social science, which controls the conversations around what's being taught and to whom. Cultural memory, critical race theory, and curriculum policy are bodies of literature that pertain to this study that allows the readers to critically interrogate the presentation of enslavement in social science curriculum and identify the challenges of textbook publishing companies writing inaccurate accounts of enslavement in the United States.

Cultural Memory

The depiction of enslavement in curriculum communicates certain messages to students about the humanity, history, and the value of African American lives in America. Cultural memory is defined as “the narratives, symbols, and discourses that help inform how one can see and think about his or her social worlds in the past and present” (Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 37). The approach to writing and teaching social science curriculum that involves the history of enslavement has the potential to be mentally violent towards African American students. This violence is rooted in shame, embarrassment, discomfort, and an inaccurate telling of America’s involvement with enslavement.

Race as the key factor in enslavement is passively mentioned or not mentioned at all. The themes that are presented in the current literature about teachings of enslavement in social science curriculum help readers become critically aware of the inaccurate narratives of enslaved African Americans. Over the years, social science textbooks have presented enslavement in multiple different ways. Those being “nonexistent, controversial but necessary economic measures, and as a Christian missionary effort to convert African heathens” (King & Woodson, 2016/2017, p. 3). All of which eliminates the existence of accountability for whites, promotes white exceptionalism, and erases the humanity of African Americans.

Much scholarship suggests social science curriculum does the job of maintaining or changing narratives of groups presented in classroom content. America’s cultural memory in curriculum promotes white innocence and exceptionalism to maintain a specific narrative while ignoring that racism is a system larger than individual acts of hatred and violence (Brown & Brown, 2010). The knowledge that is taught in social science curriculum shapes how educators

and students conceptualize historical and contemporary scholarship, which is why interrogating the accuracy of history in curriculum matters (Brown & Brown 2010).

One premise of education is to develop and maintain critical thinking skills in students. If teachers provided students with complex, crucial, and accurate facts about history, they would sharpen their critical thinking abilities and it would invite students to examine and interrogate the material they're given (Loewen, 2018). To maintain the dominant narrative and the current cultural memory of this country's involvement in historical events, those crucial facts, viewpoints, and opposing arguments are omitted from social science curriculum. Loewen quotes Jonathan Kozol who argues "school is in business to produce reliable people" (p. 305). If educators were to promote a curriculum that encourages students to critically interrogate the position, honesty, and authenticity of America, the business of schooling would operate a lot differently.

The goal of cultural memory is to equip people with the tools that are needed to examine and reexamine their position in this country. Social science curriculum has promoted the idea that African Americans and other minoritized groups are the servants of society. They are taught in ways that will keep them occupying lower rungs of society while being force fed empty promises of meritocracy and social promotion. The elimination of accuracy in social science curriculum has promoted a cultural memory that, unfortunately, ties back to enslavement. I argue, this is on purpose by design to subtly communicate to African Americans that their place in this society is in servitude.

To the point of providing students with social science curriculum that will allow them to examine their position in society, James Loewen (2018) poses the question "why should children believe what they learn in American history if their textbooks are full of distortions and lies?" (p.

339). To maintain a cultural memory that promotes white exceptionalism; innocence; and equality, the acts of systemic racism, racial violence, and accurate views of African Americans' progress in America have been distorted and re-shaped to fit into America's idea of cultural memory.

Traditional textbooks assist in reproducing and maintaining perspectives, images, and beliefs about African Americans (Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 36). Taking this into consideration, the authors argue that textbook creators have no authentic understanding of African Americans and their history to begin with, which selective cultural memory has a large responsibility in maintaining. Historically, research shows there has been a lack of interest in African American history and the information that was available was inaccurate due to the omission of crucial facts, critical viewpoints, and authentic perspectives of African American history.

Furthermore, Loewen's (2018) research displays how textbook publishers buy into material that promotes whiteness. *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, a revisionist textbook Loewen is the senior author of, was shunned by textbook publishers because it contained "too much Black history, included a photograph of a lynching, and gave too much attention to the recent past" (p. 313). As a result, states like Florida, for example, passed laws that stated history should be taught as factual, not constructed or following revisionist viewpoints (p. 313). This then pegs the question of validity when it comes to facts about America's past. The foundation of Loewen's textbook was historical research, so why was it denied so many times and categorized as inappropriate? Brown and Brown (2010) would argue that Loewen's research disrupts what is taught in schools based on cultural memory.

Additionally, the quest for citizenship in social science curriculum for African Americans is one that is troubling. LaGarrett King (2014) suggests that U.S history textbooks are used to

explore U.S citizenship and it was common for the textbooks to portray African Americans as inferior and willing to ascribe to second-class citizenship (p. 1). To this point, I argue, Loewen's work was rejected by textbook publishers because it refuted the narrative that African Americans were second-class citizens. Furthermore, Loewen's research would provide African American students with an opposing perspective to shape their cultural memory and ultimately rethink their social worlds in the past and present.

Curriculum Policy

The long-standing political game of decentralizing education shaped how American education would function going forward. History shows that the field of social studies has undergone many reconstruction periods and transformation eras that were all influenced by changes in society, which lead to creating and implementation of new policies. In the 1920s and 1940s a reconceptualization of social studies was pushed forward by policy makers with two intentions: to change the ideological direction of social studies and to keep curriculum in line with the dominant narrative of social efficiency (Kliebard, 2002). All of which has shaped and reshaped curricula in private and public sectors of schooling.

As systems of schooling shifted so did the ways in which students were educated, which meant shifts in policies to reflect those changes. No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act 2015 (ESSA) are two examples of how federal policies directly shape curriculum. In 1983, A Nation at Risk began the era of a nation-wide school reform movement, which emphasized higher standards and global competition for students, which then created the federal policy that obligated teachers to be held accountable for student performance (Mehta, 2015). The intention with NCLB was to provide educators with standards- based education reform to support their transition into an era of high-stakes testing.

Due to the changes mandated by the U.S Department of Education, curriculum transmuted into focusing on common core math, science, and reading which are all considered ‘testable’ subjects rather than giving equal importance to social science, art, and music, which are all considered non-test subjects (Dee & Jacob 2011). Researchers state that there is very limited empirical evidence provided as a result of implementation of accountability policies such as NCLB and ESSA (Dee & Jacobs 2011), which arguably causes more harm than good when the federal government is setting the parameters for public school reform without providing data to justify their demands (Mehta, 2015).

Although federal policies have directly shaped curricula content, Henig, Hula, Orr, and Pedescleaux (1999) argue that an increase in racial migration to urban areas also impacts curriculum. Henig et al. suggest that the rise in Black leadership alongside the constant white influence in policy complicates the relationship between policy and curriculum (p. 30). While this transition of power was happening, Frankenberg and Taylor (2015), argue that the success of the Civil Rights Act applied more pressure to the president and local politicians to pass legislation that allocated federal funding to all schools, which lead to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

A direct result of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is reflected in the number of white students who were enrolled in schools where African Americans had little to no accessibility. Once school segregation was determined illegal, many white parents enrolled their student(s) in charter schools leaving about only 23% of African American students enrolled in majority white schools', leaving public education to poorly funded and poorly resourced for African-Americans students. The resistance to school desegregation was widely shared in neighborhoods and curriculum. As previously discussed, curriculum supported the separation of

white and Blacks through the ways in which they presented African Americans as dangerous, unintelligent, and docile during enslavement (Watkins 2006). The same themes are prevalent in contemporary public school curriculum.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory applied to education uses race as the foundation to critically analyze the experiences and outcomes of minoritized groups in schools. Theorists argue that race is the reason for educational inequalities and disparities. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) echo W.E.B DuBois' argument that race is, in fact, the "central construction for understanding inequality" (p. 50). To understand economic, sociopolitical, cultural, and educational inequality race must be examined. Alternative Black Curriculum (ABC) was created as a response to racial attitudes, curricula inequality, and discrimination in schools, all of which had race as the common dominator. ABC was used as a tool to teach against blatant racism in social science curriculum (King, 2014).

Students' schooling experiences were heavily dependent on their race, so it was necessary to create alternative teaching methods and learning spaces were created to ensure African American students received the representation in education they deserved. Alternative Black Curriculum highlighted African American philosophers, mathematicians, social scientists, and so on. King (2014) argues early social science textbooks provided inaccurate histories, negative stereotypes, and ignored the institutional powers that promoted racism which denied citizenship to African Americans (p. 3). The result of Brown vs. Board of Education was African American students entering learning spaces where their humanity was denied, racism heavily embedded into curriculum, and the narrative of African Americans painted them as lazy, dishonest, and responsible for their realities in America (DuBois, 1935).

Scholarship suggests that social science curriculum has denied African Americans of citizenship to maintain the negative perceptions of African Americans. Social science curriculum supports the white supremacist agenda by developing and publishing content that justifies and supports the system of enslavement as a civilizing, required, religious moment in history that African Americans agreed to take part in (King 2014). Again, race has always been a determining factor in the content students are taught, how students are introduced to historical events, and the ways narratives are presented in curricula.

Once the percentage of non-white racial groups in America began to increase their schooling experiences was that of socialization and assimilation. History of curriculum shows that manual training was intended for certain groups of society, namely African Americans, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples. This curriculum was used as a tool to keep those minoritized groups serving in lower rungs of society. It was intended to keep them as workers with little to no chance of becoming the leaders of the world (Kliebard 2002). Race has always matter in creating and teaching curriculum. As Kliebard refers to Dubois' work, there was a push for vocational curriculum and practical activities to be developed into one holistic curriculum that would develop the intellect of African Americans (pp. 24-25). The result of this push for curriculum reform was "a curriculum designed for future servants and laborers and not educated men and women" (p. 25). African Americans were, and still are, educated to be workers instead of leaders simply because of their race.

The ways in which African American teachers interact with curriculum also shapes the ways in which students receive the content. Foster (1990) looks at the structural constraints of race and the impact it has on teachers' experiences. After school were legally desegregated, African American teachers who taught at integrated schools experienced animosity, resentment,

and resistance from their white colleagues and parents. Foster reports that an African American teacher shared that she was met with resistance when she attempted to provide a multicultural education as the foundation of her curriculum (p. 128). It is crucial for the sake of this analysis to look at the micro-level impact racial representations in curriculum has in the classrooms as well. The presence of whiteness in curriculum is overpowering, dismissive, and, in some ways, dehumanizing to marginalized groups.

Racial representation in physical learning environments is just as important as racial representation in curriculum. They both impact the ways in which students interact and perform in school. Chris Emdin (2017) argues that the presence of whiteness can communicate the same feeling of superiority in classrooms when it goes unchecked. When white people enter spaces occupied by African American scholars their presence can often communicate the same messages that are embedded in curriculum, which impacts the ways in which students interact with them and the curriculum. In thinking about lessons built around the enslavement of Africans, the presence of whiteness in a learning space can feel threatening to students (Emdin 2017). It is not uncommon for history textbooks to publish content that promotes white exceptionalism around historical happenings in America. For example, David Yacavone (2018) looks at how whiteness is portrayed as the hero in historic events in America. Yacavone's findings support the argument that textbook racism promotes white superiority and white exceptionalism, in order to do so, the portrayal of African Americans must be the ones who need saving.

The intersection of race, enslavement, and curriculum is one that is not largely discussed for many reasons. A few of those reasons being a lack of education on the subject matter; a nation-wide effort to live in a colorblind society; and a disregard of understanding the ways in

which curriculum can promote inequalities that parallel societal inequalities for African American students.

Conceptual Framework

Afro-Pessimism

Afro-Pessimism is described as the perception that the continent of Africa is and will always be an uneducated, poverty-stricken, third-world continent all of which are conclusions drawn from the perceptions of Africa through the Western view. Afro-pessimism is largely researched by sociologist, historians, and anthropologists (Schorr, 2011) and used to analyze the Western view of Africa and of Africans. This framework is best suited for this study because the 7 elements provide better insight on the ways in which the Western world views Africa as a whole and subsequently writes about the continent and its people in curricula, the media, and other informational outlets. Afro-Pessimism describes the concepts, theories, and attitudes about Africa and African Americans that were developed and maintained by the Western view.

It is important to note that the Western view refers directly to Whiteness and the perceptions of Africa and African Americans through the white gaze. Each of the seven aspects of Afro-Pessimism demonstrate the general disinterest and lack of knowledge about Africa published by Western media in all forms. There is a systematic trend of misrepresenting Africa upheld by white scholars, journalist, and historians (Michira, 2002) for the purpose of justifying the treatment of Africans an African Americans and fulfilling false narratives of Africa, in other words upholding white supremacy. Although Afro-Pessimism is closely related to critical race theory, Afro-pessimism as a theory is solely based on perceptions of Africa made by the Western world and the attitudes and conclusions that are results of those perceptions. In 2002, James

Michara developed seven elements to the theory that clearly define what Afro-Pessimism is. I will list those aspects and explain how they relate directly to social science curriculum.

The first aspect of Afro-Pessimism is homogeneity, Africa is wholly viewed as a country rather than a continent, which allows curriculum writers to group Africans as one and describe them as a monoethnic racial group with the same shared experiences, culture, and values. There are 54 countries in Africa, and they are not discussed in curricula content to any extent. This allows the narrative of all Africans and African Americans to be generalized and accepted in curriculum. The second aspect to Afro-Pessimism is the myth that Africa is the “dark continent” (p. 3) that has no history and no positive contributions to the progression of humanity (Enwezor, 2006). In collaboration with the first, writing Africa off as having no history allowed ill-intending historians and anthropologists to create the narrative of Africans that they are “heathens with backward traditions, practices, and superstitions” (Michira, 2015, p. 3). This narrative of Africans is what developed the room for the idea that Africans needed to be saved from tumultuous lifestyles and brought to better living conditions, which is a narrative that is published in social science curriculum as a justification for enslavement.

To further feed into the idea that Africans had no access or knowledge about healthy living, is the third element of Afro-Pessimism, which is the idea that Africa is a disease and illness carrying continent that is fully invested with AIDS and HIV. The counter narrative, here, is that there are plenty of countries in Africa that have not had high cases of reported AIDS/HIV. Michira (2015) argues media outlets feed into this narrative by strategically crafting images of Africa that buys into the portrayal of Africa as a poverty-stricken continent full of violence and disease.

The fourth element of Afro-Pessimism is narrative that the continent of African is a place of starvation (Michira 2015). Michira argues that of all the images circulating of Africa, famine seems to be the most persistent one. This further paint the picture of hopelessness and desperation and an outcry for help whilst the Western world turns a blind eye to poverty, homelessness, and starvation of its own. Which also supports the narrative that America helped Africans rather than caused harm by giving them labor once they left Africa. The fifth element provides an idea of how Westerners view the land in Africa. That is to say, the geography, animals, and wildlife of Africa is interesting enough for tourists to visit and write about. When Africa's beauty is celebrated, humans are typically absent in those images (p. 4).

The sixth element, and I argue, the most important piece of supporting evidence in the portrayals and narratives about enslavement is the violence that is easily and heavily associated with Africa. The conceptualization that Africans are naturally violent not only feeds into the first element of homogeneity, but further justifies the narratives of the enslaved in social science curriculum. Furthermore, this portrayal of African Americans in social science curriculum enhances the white exceptionalism and white supremacy that is heavily embedded in history lessons. By looking at Africans and African Americans in an animalistic way, it is easier for historians, curriculum writers, and anthropologists to justify the system of slavery.

All of which leads to the seventh element of Afro-Pessimism. Which is the concept that Africa, as a whole, is politically unstable and in dire need of assistance. The Western world promoting the idea that Africa needs political direction corresponds with the aspect of Afro-Pessimism that Africa has no history and can further be used as a justification for enslavement. Many social science researchers argue that the seven elements of Afro-Pessimism are relentlessly presented in curriculum as a means of justification for the enslavement of African

Americans. Looking at curriculum from an Afro-Pessimistic view is to critically interrogate the content that is being produced in curriculum, and although I do not know what the evidence from McGraw Hill and Pearson will present, I am looking for content that will assist in answering the research question explained below.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

How is enslavement portrayed in 3rd through 5th grade curriculum? is the driving research question. Utilizing Afro-Pessimism as the conceptual framework, this research question seeks to provide an understanding of the ways in which enslavement is taught in upper primary grades. The question asked above aligns closely with the foundation of Afro-Pessimism by seeking to understand what is being said about Africa and what is being published to inform decisions and conclusions about Africans and African people from the Western perspective. Furthermore, the question guiding this research is also laying in the foundation of cultural acceptance in America, critical race studies, and the ways in which policies are formulated and mandated.

For an in-depth understanding of the learning experiences of African American students, a qualitative research method was used as a means to seek out an answer to the guiding research question that is “How is 3rd-5th grade social science curriculum presenting enslavement?” This study took an analytical approach to analyzing 3rd-5th grade social science curriculum published by McGraw-Hill and Pearson taught in public schools nationwide. A content analysis is an analytical tool used to engage with multiple components of a text including deconstructing texts into independent analysis and non-verbal content (Mayring, 2004).

For this qualitative research study, a content analysis allowed me to critically interrogate the presence of language, pictures, placement of texts, placement of pictures, the implications of

meanings and relationships, concepts, and themes used throughout sections of the texts that were analyzed in this study. By using a content analysis, which consisted of using the aspects aforementioned, I had more material to engage the theory of Afro-Pessimism as a framework to analyze 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum in addition to having more supporting evidence to answer the research question. Cultural memory, curriculum policy, and critical race theory served as supporting themes of Afro-Pessimism, which strengthened the analysis to find evidence to support the research question. The two themes that were most supportive in this analysis are cultural memory and critical race theory. A content analysis allowed me to use both themes to engage the concepts and conclusions that are presented in the portrayal of enslavement in 3rd through 5th social science texts. Curriculum policy was impactful for the findings because it provided insight on the ways in which learning standards shape what is included in social science curriculum.

Data Collection

The data was collected from published social studies textbooks, online learning resources, and teacher guides from both publishing companies. This study aimed to produce the knowledge that will enhance the understanding of the African and African American experience during enslavement. The language, images, headings, definitions, and subheadings published by McGraw-Hill and Pearson were analyzed to better understand the representations of enslavement, messages being communicated to readers about Africans and African Americans, and the accuracy of information published by these two companies. The material ranged from 2009 to 2020. Education policies, testing requirements, and curriculum policies in public school have all changed drastically over the last 10 years and this research also aimed to reflect the changes in education and social studies curriculum.

The McGraw-Hill editions of textbooks were 1st, 2nd, and one Illinois specific textbook. The Pearson textbooks were also 1st and 2nd editions and two National Geographic editions. Additionally, the online learning curriculum from Pearson was curated through a partnership with National Geographic as well. The collaboration with National Geographic and Pearson were targeted for 5th grade curriculum only. There was no risk of running into ethical issues for this research study due to human participants not being involved at any capacity. All material obtained for data collection was purchased, loaned from a public library, or given to the researcher by licensed educators teaching in public schools.

Data Analysis

The data was coded based on five main categories: Afro-Pessimism (which was given sub codes for each of the seven elements), American exceptionalism, racism, white superiority, and other. These five codes were used because they are themes that are closely tied into the subject of enslavement in any context. Afro-Pessimism as the framework addresses overarching views of Africa and Africans. American exceptionalism allows readers to get an understanding of America's past and present position on enslavement in the United States. Racism was identified by the verbiage used to describe the enslaved. For example, if racial slurs were used as descriptors it would be categorized as "racism." Content that counted as "other" were things unaccounted for such as the erasure of race to describe enslavement, the presentation of meritocracy connected to enslavement, and the overarching truth about enslavement without the presence of exceptionalism, superiority, racism, or a theme of Afro-Pessimism.

Throughout the analysis for each textbook, teacher manual, and guide, and pictures from the online resource the five categories aforementioned were used to collect information that supported the main research question and offered additional information that enriched the

importance of the sub research questions as well. Excel spreadsheets were used to organize the data. There was one tab for each grade level for McGraw-Hill and Pearson. For example, one tab was utilized for McGraw-Hill's 3rd grade social studies curriculum another for Pearson's 3rd grade social studies curriculum. On each tab, there were rows that identified the specifics of the material. The rows read as follows: name, type of curriculum [sub codes were used to represent the variation of resources (textbook, teacher manual and guide or online curriculum)], edition and year, Author(s), Afro-Pessimism, American exceptionalism, racism, white superiority, other, and a row for notes. Each column represented an analysis from the resources. For example, if there was a line that seemed prominent to answering the research question, it would be entered into the corresponding column (identifying the type of resource and the category/ies the curriculum fell under) and all other information with the exception of notes was entered using the data validation tool that offers a drop down menu and makes entering codes more manageable.

The themes were identified based on the definitions for each code. For example, if material about enslavement was presented as a means for economic stability and fulfilling labor, it was sorted as Afro-Pessimism with the sub code of Starvation because the content is alluding to the idea that the continent of Africa lacked the economic resources to provide its citizens with stability and work. Once the material was sorted, I added notes to support the research question that deconstructed what was being said about enslavement and how it was being portrayed to students. To compare and contrast which themes were existed across textbooks, teacher manuals, and images the notes were cross referenced in addition to which codes and sub-codes were used. If the themes were consistent across texts, then the portrayal of enslavement across those grade levels was reported in my findings.

As an African American woman who navigated the schooling system looking for reassurance, cultural connectivity, and positive reflections of my racial and cultural identity in social science curriculum the portrayal of enslavement is something that has always been daunting. In high school, I experienced the humiliation and discomfort of the unwarranted responsibility of being the spokesperson for African Americans' historical experiences because often times I was the only African American student in class. I began to notice that European students, Muslim students, and Irish students were not tokenized or given the responsibility to speak for their culture during history lessons. I soon began to understand the distinct difference between schooling and education for African American students.

In acknowledging that there was difference between the system of schooling and the experience of education, I wanted to this research to shed light on the ways in which the portrayal of historical events can hinder or facilitate African Americans students' experiences and relationships with curriculum. So, posing the research question as something broad that will explore multiple areas of enslavement in curriculum was vital in providing understanding of an area that is often overlooked in early learning.

This research topic is very personal, and I wanted to provide a voice to marginalized students who may have the same feelings in elementary school as I did in high school. I wanted this research to further validate African American students' schooling experiences and it was important for me to do so objectively by providing empirical data to support African American students. In acknowledging my position as an African American woman who has spent time in educator-like roles, it was also important for this research to provide teachers with more insight of the ways in which social science curriculum can impact African American students emotionally and mentally.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Three sections in this chapter describe the portrayal of enslavement in 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum. These sections provide evidence that the portrayal of enslavement in social science curriculum has the potential to hinder African American students' relationship with social sciences as they move throughout their schooling careers. It is clear that the ways in which enslaved human beings are portrayed are counterproductive to the reality of enslavement as a system. The literature reveals that the portrayal of enslavement in social science curriculum does not honor the humanity of the enslaved and by avoiding the conversation of race as the key contributing factor for enslavement and its aftermath, curriculum continues to promote white supremacy and American exceptionalism.

I use the three themes of Afro-Pessimism, Messaging, and Curriculum policy as the dominant themes in understanding the influence of the underwritings of American exceptionalism in United States history lessons. Afro-Pessimism is a broader framework, but some of the seven sub-themes of Afro-Pessimism (Homogeny, Dark Continent, Africans as wild/animal like, Starvation, Violent, Political Instability, and HIV/AIDS) can be found throughout social science curriculum across the three grade levels. The messaging in curriculum, I argue, is what has the potential to shape the relationships of students and social science curriculum. The presentation of enslavement being raceless is associated with the lower grade levels, but it is salient in understanding the portrayal of the system of enslavement. Curriculum

policies shaped by state learning standards shape the material that is produced and published in curriculum in general. This study reveals that curriculum policies shape the learning standards that encourage the presentation of enslavement as an economic asset.

Afro-Pessimistic Themes in Curriculum

The three most prevalent themes of Afro-Pessimism in social science curriculum presented by McGraw-Hill and Pearson are political instability, starvation, and homogeneity. These three themes are used to justify the system of enslavement in the United States of America by portraying Africa as an economically desperate, politically unstable, homogenous, and poverty-stricken continent. As a result of this false representation, it was easy for curriculum writers to portray enslavement as a system that was beneficial for Africans because it provided labor, economic stability, and a chance to better their lives. All of which is very similar to the narrative of the American Dream that is congruent with present day immigration.

Political Instability

McGraw-Hill's 5th grade textbooks states that indentured servitude was a method Africans used to gain "land and freedom" in America (p. 162). This line suggests that the continent of Africa is in political turmoil, which is the reasoning for captive Africans being traded for goods to enhance the economy. Furthermore, McGraw-Hill's third grade student inquiry journal includes a section which identifies Abraham Lincoln as an American hero. The reasoning is due to the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. "A hero is a person who does something brave to help others" (p. 204). Lincoln here is defined as a hero because he "declared that enslaved Americans were now free" (p. 205).

Here it is important to highlight the erasure of the voices of the enslaved. Before the Emancipation Proclamation, the enslaved would gather together, secretly, to learn how to read

and write so that they gain political awareness and political gain (Williams, 2009). Furthermore, prior to enslaved Africans being brought to America, each country in Africa had political systems in which Africans were fluent (Johnson, 1999). In 2015, McGraw-Hill released a social science textbook that presented enslavement as the voluntary migration of African workers to the southern states of America to voluntarily work in the agricultural industry. A critical race approach to that presentation of enslavement in curriculum argue that social science curriculum writers have undermined the history of enslavement, promoted white exceptionalism, and continuously communicates messages about white superiority by undermining the experiences of African American people.

Homogeneity and Starvation

Homogeneity and starvation are grouped together because one plays off of the other in curriculum. That is to say that the generalizations of Africa made it easier for curriculum writers to push the narrative that Africans were in some way, shape, or form desperately lacking the essentials in Africa to maintain and develop healthy flourishing lives in Africa. It is important to note that the generalizations presented and pushed in curriculum are from the view of white males, as mentioned previously.

To justify enslavement, as presented in Mc-Graw Hill's 5th grade social studies curriculum, as a system of labor that was essential for the betterment of African people is to completely ignore, demoralize, and push to assimilate the ways of living in Africa that have been prosperous for its people for centuries. At the same token, the information presented in the curriculum mentioned above suggests that all Africans were denied land and freedom in Africa. Homogeneity and starvation are presented here with the grouping of the thousands of Africans as being in need of America's assistance further justifying the system of enslavement without going

into details of the actual process of obtaining humans and the extent of violence which was inflicted on the enslaved.

The American Journey, McGraw-Hill's 5th grade social science textbook specific to Illinois' learning standards, consistently refers to enslaved African Americans as "enslaved workers" (p. 407), but they also include a line that disrupts the concept of work. It states that enslaved African Americans worked and earned no money (p. 409). Furthermore, a stark contrast to the point mentioned above is presented in a small section that includes a picture of slave tags (see Figure 2 in Appendix). The description states "copper slave tags identified enslaved workers when they were hired out." (p. 410). Again, the concept of work here is disrupted. On one hand the curriculum portrays enslavement as an economically rewarding system for African Americans while on the other hand, enslaved Africans were not allowed to earn money although the term hire is used and implied throughout the textbook. It is important to call attention to how work is being described in this 5th grade textbook because it aligns with the argument made earlier that is, African Americans are subliminally reminded taught that their role in America is that of servitude, which reiterates the challenges of social science curriculum ascribing second class citizenship to African Americans.

The positioning of slave labor in this way paints a picture of continental starvation and desperation in Africa. At an early age, children are taught to understand the system of employment to earn money. The positioning of enslavement here is that enslaved African Americans were working to leverage debt or in exchange for housing, and other resources they lacked in Africa. Furthermore, the introduction of slave codes by McGraw-Hill perpetuates the false idea that enslaved Africans complicit and comfortable with their environments, even though there were laws created to ensure cooperation (p. 410).

Messages Communicated About the Enslaved

There is no secret about who the enslaved were. McGraw-Hill and Pearson both clearly state that enslaved beings were from Africa. McGraw-Hill's 5th grade curriculum communicates that the value of enslaved Africans is solely contingent upon their ability to quickly produce cotton (p. 403). McGraw-Hill communicates to 5th grade learners that as the demand for cotton increased, the value of enslaved people increased because they were the key to producing large quantities of cotton rapidly (p. 403). The picture above this paragraph shows brown skinned people as those enslaved people (see Figure 1 in Appendix). As mentioned previously, racial identity formation for African Americans is about more than commonalities with physical appearance, but with the picture to accommodate the passage, it is physical appearance that students are more likely to identify with first. This communicates to African American students that their heritage in America begins as enslaved laborers.

The messages communicated to young African American students is "slavery reduced to the simplicity of a pure form; a person with a price" (Johnson, 1999). As mentioned in the section above, Africans were used as collateral to settle debts, which is arguably different from servitude. McGraw-Hill's 5th grade curriculum states that "Settlers from Missouri brought enslaved African Americans with them" (p. 447). Enslavement stripped humanity away from the enslaved by objectifying them as machines of labor. The reasoning for Missourians bringing enslaved humans with them as they traveled was to perform labor and produce cotton goods, which further supports the portrayal of enslavement as an economic asset in America and African Americans were the key to productivity. McGraw-Hill's 3rd grade inquiry journal briefly discusses the intention and impact of the Civil War. Here, the curriculum states that America fought a war against each other because there were differences in the decision to remain

as one country or split into two. Then the mention of “enslaved Americans” is present (p. 205). Arguably, this communicates that those who were enslaved were objectified and voiceless in the decision-making process, but in some way, unspecified, played a role.

On the other hand, McGraw-Hill’s third grade textbook paints enslavement as indentured servitude, as mentioned before, and also adds a layer of meritocracy into the mix. “An African named Anthony Johnson arrived in Jamestown in about 1621 and worked there as an indentured servant. After working off his debt, he became a landowner” (p. 162). It is clear that this African was stripped of his identity through the Americanization of his name. I would also like to shed light on the presentation of indentured servitude here. This statement implies that there is a debt to be paid for being brought to America. Furthermore, it projects the longstanding idea that if African Americans work hard enough, they’ll be lifted out of debt and able to thrive in the American economy independently. I find this messaging extremely troubling because pushing the notion of meritocracy erases the truths of foundation and aftermath of enslavement.

McGraw-Hill sticks to the theme of meritocracy by publishing a curriculum that projects cotton picking as a skilled labor that African migrated to America for further pushing the notion that enslavement was an economic asset. Here I also found doing an analysis across the two companies that racelessness was associated with enslavement but not with indentured servitude in 3rd grade social science curriculum. On the other hand, McGraw-Hill made it very clear that 20 African captives were traded as payment to leverage debt. Here, it can be concluded that racelessness is oddly ascribed to indentured servitude while it is very clear that Africans were enslaved. To further promote the presentation of humans as property, in McGraw-Hill’s 5th grade social science textbook, curriculum writers introduce slave codes as laws that controlled the enslaved (p. 410). In an effort to keep the enslaved complicit, the codes were also ways to

ensure white men obtained rights to those who were a part of their plantations. Overall, the curriculum presented communicates that African Americans were not ascribed citizenship definitely not during and arguably not after enslavement.

A subtext included on page 409 of *The American Journey* invites students to make connections between their lives and the lives of the enslaved by asking “Can you imagine moving to a foreign land that has different customs? Read to learn how enslaved African Americans coped with their situation.” Not only is this text tone deaf and extremely misleading, it, again, promotes the erasure of the system of enslavement that made coping with realities far more difficult than readjusting to different customs. I argue this is conflicting with the curriculum on the rest of the page. Whilst students are encouraged to think about voluntarily relocating to another environment with different customs, they are told that those who moved to a foreign country were considered slaves. This messaging implies that there was freedom, autonomy, and choice associated with the move.

Policy as an Enabler of American Exceptionalism in Curriculum

There has been a major shift in educational policies that regulates standardized testing. That being said, students are being drilled to perform well on tests and are given constant reminders of what is expected of them on those tests. McGraw-Hill’s (2009) 5th grade Illinois Edition of *The American Journey* lists the state’s learning standards at the beginning of every chapter and some throughout the lessons. The learning standards presented in these findings are from 2009 so they do not reflect the current standard for learning criteria, but they are valid in exposing the ways in which American exceptionalism is upheld at multiple levels of education. I argue, the learning standards support American exceptionalism in curriculum by requiring students to identify key elements of relationships between citizens and economy; explain the

relationship of diverse groups' contributions and the United States social systems; the relationship between the economy and enslavement McGraw-Hill (p. 394).

To further demonstrate the relationship between economic growth and enslavement, McGraw-Hill states introduces the invention of the cotton gin (p. 401). Then goes on to vaguely describe the relationship increased production of cotton and the labor of the enslaved. "The economy in the south was thriving. The economy depended, however, on slavery. Having all but disappeared from the North, slavery was growing stronger than ever in the South" (p. 401). The Illinois learning standard that supports American exceptionalism here, is 16.C.3b found in *The American Journey* (p. 400), which states students should be able to explain the relationships among the American economy and slavery, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, 1700-present. The learning standard presented in lessons of enslavement promotes American exceptionalism with the erasure of exploitation, violence, and the foundation of thief that enslavement was built upon. All of them support the continued portrayal of the system of enslavement being an economic asset to the United States, which promotes exceptionalism with the erasure of America's crimes of kidnapping thousands of Africans to bring them to Jamestown, Virginia for the production of labor.

The learning standards shape enslavement as immigration and African laborers were in control of their own social mobility. Furthermore, the portrayal of enslavement as a relationship between citizens and the economy promotes the notion that America is the land of the free, which aligns with the projection that in exchange for labor, Africans were rewarded with land and freedom. *The American Journey* describes cotton-picking as an agricultural labor with majority African American workers. "After harvest, workers had to carefully separate the plant's sticky seeds from the cotton fibers" is how the labor of cotton picking is described to 5th graders

(p. 401). Here, it is important to note that the term worker is used to describe enslaved humans, which I argue further feeds into the learning standards that promote American exceptionalism by downplaying the harsh, violent, and dehumanizing practices of the white men who owned plantations.

Learning standards mandated by policy creates a false narrative that immigration and enslavement are equally yoked in experience, opportunities, and choice. Herrera (2005) reports that, according to Illinois standards, by 5th grade students are expected to recall important information from texts and memorize key ideas. As mentioned above, the key ideas presented in the Illinois' 5th grade social studies curriculum suggests that Africans migrated to America to achieve the American dream by picking cotton and working on a plantation, which, as argued before, supports the idea of American exceptionalism with the erasure of the true process of enslavement, the experiences, and the aftermath that lingers into today's systems, practices, and perceptions.

To further feed into the perception of enslavement as a debt leveraging system, the language that is used to describe enslaved African Americans is loaded, coded, and contradicts the experiences of enslaved beings. For example, in the section about plantations, there is a line that promotes the erasure of whiteness, which I argue promotes American exceptionalism it reads: "Most slaveholders held fewer than 10 enslaved workers" (p. 405). It is also important to point out the blatant lie that is printed. Enslaved humans were considered property, and similar to today, owning large amounts of property equates to wealth, which strongly implies that they owned more than 10 enslaved Africans. Additionally, it erases the reality that when enslaved women gave birth, their child(ren) would inherit the status of their parent.

All plantation owners were white and considered wealthy. McGraw-Hill attempts to paint a picture of sameness by including a section about farmers juxtaposing it to plantation owners (p. 407). Also, it is important to note the misleading language that is how slave owners and the enslaved are described. According to the Illinois learning standard 18.C.3b, coding the relationship between enslaved Africans and white men as mentioned above allows students to understand how “diverse groups have contributed to U.S social systems overtime” (p. 406).

To push this narrative further, house slaves were referred to as “domestic workers” who performed the labor of cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundry and serving meals (p. 408). Portraying enslavement in this way promotes American exceptionalism through erasure due to the fact that house slaves were women who were routinely beaten by white women and faced sexual exploitation repeatedly by white men (King, 2004). It is senseless to portray enslavement in a friendly, light, workforce relationship when that portrayal completely ignores the harsh violent reality of Black women during enslavement. To this point, curriculum policy continues to allow educators to teach material in a way that misinforms youth to promote American exceptionalism for the sake of learning standards.

Moreover, the ways in which decisions to end enslavement have been projected onto the states, which, I argue, portrays the system of enslavement as being upheld and protected by a few *bad* people and practices rather than a whole country. Complying with the Illinois’ learning standards, *The American Journey* completely eliminates information regarding how long the slave trades lasted and the violence the system maintained overall. I suggest this is to maintain the narrative of indentured servitude and the relationship of labor and the economy, which promotes the narrative that the enslaved were just paying off debts to gain land and freedom as mentioned in the sections above.

CHAPTER FIVE
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Implications

The findings reveal that enslavement and indentured servitude are presented as debt-leveraging systems that shared some similarities. Also, the findings reveal that state learning standards support enslavement being portrayed in social science curriculum simply as a relationship of productivity between African and America to boost the growing economy. The portrayals of enslavement in 3rd through 5th grade social science curriculum communicates to African American students that their worth is solely depended on the amount of work they are able to produce, their ancestors were perceived as tradeable goods necessary for the growth of the American economy, and the system of enslavement was a way for Africans to migrate to America for work.

Black history in curriculum can be reaffirming without inducing trauma, insecurities, or promoting already established racial hierarchies. It is imperative for African American students to have multicultural curriculum because a piece of their racial identity formation heavily relies on cultural commonalities in curriculum content (Piper, 2015). Educators must confront and challenge misconceptions in curriculum. Teacher preparation programs must equip their students with the resources, tools, and confidence to do so. This study exhibits the importance of social science curriculum being an area of multicultural inclusion in ways that do not retraumatize African American students. Social science curriculum renders meaning to students, particularly

marginalized students, when they are able to culturally connect to the curriculum content.

African American students being able to use curriculum to enhance their schooling experiences and ultimately increase their academic achievements is vital in their educational trajectory (Piper, 2005). As African American students begin to inhale curriculum content to make sense of history and recall important content, it is important that they are given curriculum content that does not belittle them or strip away their humanity.

When the portrayals of enslavement in social science curriculum are challenged it provides an opportunity for educators and students to learn together. This is extremely beneficial for educators and students who do not identify as African American or as persons of color. To this point, collectively increasing knowledge about the history of enslavement in America further validates African American students' identities, experiences, and knowledge in the classrooms, which as mentioned previously, is crucial for racial identity formation. The findings reflect a bigger issue with enslavement in social science curriculum that can be addressed by educators and curriculum writers. That is, most if not all, inclusions of enslavement for lower primary grades are very brief and abridged. It is not due to those sections packing important, crucial, and indispensable information, arguably it is because those sections are lacking exactly those components. The information available about enslavement in 3rd and 4th grade social science curriculum is very limited at scope. I suggest expanding upon an accurate introduction of enslavement to better equip students with information and skills that will allow them to critically engage with content and make informed decisions about their environments moving forward. Additionally, this study is important for parents and educators who want to critically engage with the curriculum content being taught to students. It provides them with breadth of view into the Afro-Pessimistic portrayals of enslavement in social science curriculum. The findings in this

study should prompt educators to be proactive in calling out the problematic literature amongst peer groups and advocate for a change in curriculum. There is very little room in the market for competition being that McGraw-Hill and Pearson are the two most widely used textbooks in the country. They write the curriculum and they write the standardized tests. Educators, researchers, and policy makers must demand change. They must demand that these two publishers are writing curriculum that is conducive to all cultural backgrounds without promoting exceptionalism.

The Illinois Learning Standards that are presented on in the findings section of this paper are from 2009 and it is important to note that learning standards for social studies curriculum have shifted. As of September of 2013, states like Illinois adopted the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework as the tool for learning standards in social studies (Herczog, 2013). This framework was designed to prepare teachers to use an inquiry-based approach to assist students in building and maintaining critical thinking skills to come to informed decisions about society and to better prepare students to become citizens of democracy (Herczog, 2013). The noticeable change in learning standards and the C3 framework are the specifications of what students should have mastered according to grade levels. An inquiry-based approach allows for more exploration of topics such as immigration, enslavement, and labor but for educators who are not privy to these content areas, textbooks will serve as the guiding tool simply because teacher preparation programs have failed to equip professionals with the skills and tools needed to critically engage with race in curriculum. As presented in textbooks, the portrayal of enslavement as a skilled labor that was beneficial for Africans and African Americans will continuously go undisputed if educators are not trained to identify, challenge, and correct the lies in social science curriculum.

Conclusions

Social science curriculum has painted a system of theft, violence, and rejection of citizenship as an act of labor deemed necessary for the American economy. Illinois' civic learning standards for 5th grade promotes the idea of enslavement being taught as a business in order to teach students about the relationship between immigrants, citizens, and the economy. Here, I argue that curriculum presenting enslavement in a way that continues to objectify African Americans and hides the brutality that America projected onto Africans is not reaffirming to African American students and quite frankly, re-traumatizes them. It is on purpose by design that America's past is written about in such a positive light.

Truth is, there is no right or wrong time to address race with children but presenting America's history as raceless causes more harm than help. The issue with America pushing for a colorblind society is that colorblindness erases the true history and realities of people of color, specifically African American and Black kids. Teaching kids to not see color is giving them permission to invalidate the lived experiences of African American children. Colorblindness gives kids the permission to grow into adults who say things like "slavery was a choice". As parents, educators, and stakeholders having conversations about race does not have to be scary or categorized as developmentally inappropriate. The same goes for accurate portrayals of race and enslavement in curriculum as well. There are creative ways to teach and discuss social issues with early childhood learners. Sesame Street has been addressing social issues with children since 1969. It is time that our social science curriculum does the same without American exceptionalism, respectability politics, or portraying horrific moments in this country as raceless.

This study aims to encourage parents, educators, and students to challenge those perceptions. Third through fifth grade is when students are learning to read for information, and

it becomes troublesome when African American students are learning about their ancestor's experiences in this country through a falsified lens. Schools are where students learn to become citizens of society; schools socialize students into social groups; schools can also be the site of violence for students and curriculum should not reciprocate anti-Black structures that parallel social inequalities for African Americans. The messages communicated to African American students about themselves are problematic in that they communicate to students that their place in society is laborers. Humanity is stripped away, and hopelessness is concealed within the lines of lessons about enslavement. As parents, educators, and researchers we must address the pessimistic exceptionalism hidden in social science curriculum to provide African American students with long-lasting, unconditional support as they navigate their history in textbooks. The portrayals of enslavement in curriculum are used as justification of the malpractice, mistreatment, and harm inflicted onto African Americans today.

APPENDIX A
FIGURES



Figure 1 from McGraw-Hill *The American Journey*.



Figure 2 from McGraw-Hill's *The American Journey*.

REFERENCE LIST

- Brown, A.L., & Brown, D. K. (2010). Strange fruit indeed: Interrogating contemporary textbook representations of racial violence toward African Americans. *Teachers College Record*, *112*(1), 31-67.
- Bruce, D. (1992). W. E. B. Du Bois and the idea of double consciousness. *American Literature*, *64*(2), 299-309.
- Chavous, T. M., Bernat, D. H., Schmeelk-Cone, K., Caldwell, C. H., Kohn-Wood, L., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2003). Racial identity and academic attainment among African American adolescents. *Child Development*, *74*(4), 1076-1090.
- Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. (2011). The impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *30*(3), 418-446.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1935). *Black reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Emdin, C. (2017). *For White folks who teach in the hood and the rest of yall too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Random House Inc.
- Enwezor, O. (2006). *Snap judgements: New positions in contemporary African photography*.
- Foster, M. (1990). *The politics of race: Through the eyes of African American teachers*. *Journal of Education*, *172*(3), 123-141.
- Frankenberg, E., & Taylor, K. (2015). ESEA and the Civil Rights Act: An interbranch approach to furthering desegregation. *Journal of the Social Sciences*, *1*(3), 32-49.
- Harper, B. E. (2007). The relationship between Black racial identity and academic achievement in urban settings. *Theory into Practice*, *46*(3), 230-238. doi: 10.1080/14241270701402231
- Henig, J. R., Hula, R. C., Orr, M., & Pedescleaux, D. S. (1999). *The color of school reform: Race, politics, and the challenge of urban education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Herrera, A. R. (2005). *Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) reading test performance and oral reading rate of 3rd and 5th grade Illinois students*. Masters Theses.

- Herczog, M. (2013). *Introduction to the C3 Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.socialstudies.org>
- Johnson, W. (1999). *Soul by soul: Life in the antebellum slave market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- King, L. J. (2014). When lions write history: Black history textbooks, African American educators, and the alternative Black curriculum in social studies education, 1890-1940. *Multicultural Education*, 22(1), 2-11.
- King, L. J., & Woodson, A. N. (2016/2017, Winter). Baskets of cotton and birthday cakes: Teaching slavery in social studies classrooms. *Social Studies Education Review*, 6(1), 1-18.
- King, W. (2014). Prematurely knowing of evil: The sexual abuse of African American girls and young women in slavery and freedom. *The Journal of African American History*, 99(3), 173-196.
- Kliebard, H. M. (2002). *Changing course: American curriculum reform in the 20th century*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. T. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 49-68.
- Lewis, A. (2004). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and communities*. Rutgers University Press.
- Loewen, J. W. (1974). *Mississippi conflict and change*. Pantheon Books.
- Loewen, J. W. (2018). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything American history textbooks get wrong*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2), 1-10.
- Mehta, J. (2015). *The allure of order: High hopes, dashed expectations, and the troubled quest to remake American schooling*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Michira, J. (2002). *Images of African in the western media*. Retrieved from http://teachingliterature.org/teachingliterature/pdf/multi/images_of_africa_michira.pdf
- Piper, R. E. (2015). Multicultural education in action: A multiple case study of Black elementary aged children's identity development and engagement with civil rights literature. *ProQuest LLC*.

Schorr, V. (2011). *Economics of Afro-pessimism: The economics of Afro-pessimism in African foreign direct investment*. Institute of African Studies.

Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Testing - The Testing Industry's Big Four | Testing Our Schools | FRONTLINE. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/testing/companies.htm>

Watkins, W. (2006). Social reconstruction in education: Seeking our Black voices. *Social Reconstruction: People, politics, and perspectives* (pp. 211-234).

Yacovone, D. (2018, April 8). *How scholars sustained White supremacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Scholars-Sustained-White/243053>

VITA

Ms. Sondrea Singleton was born and raised in Chicago, IL. Before receiving her Masters of Arts in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies for Loyola University Chicago, Ms. Singleton received her Bachelors of Arts in Sociology and African American Studies from Northeastern Illinois University. During her time as a Rambler, Ms. Singleton served as the Social Events Chair for the Black Graduate Student Alliance, an organization dedicated to serving the Black Graduate students on Loyola's campuses. Ms. Singleton currently serves as a Program Coordinator for an organization that assists youth who are aging out of foster care. She hopes to eventually navigate into a role of curriculum writing and educational policies for public schools in Chicago.