

## Teaching black history as a racial literacy project

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### ABSTRACT

Scholars have long promoted black history as an appropriate space to promote the development of racial literacy. Few research studies, however, have examined how teacher education uses black history as a heuristic to teach about race. Using racial literacy as a framework, this article examined the varied ways four social studies pre-service teachers interpret and taught race through black history. The pre-service teachers were aided by a black history summer reading program dedicated to help them gain the necessary knowledge to teach race through black history. The findings indicated that the pre-service teachers taught race and black history more critical than traditional US history classes but were limited in their presentation of black history and race.

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Many teacher educators express concern about pre-service teachers' lack of critical racial knowledge (Cochran-Smith 2000; Milner 2003; Sleeter 2001). Beginning teachers often adopt liberal principals about race, sometimes ignoring it so as to avoid offending racial groups or sounding racist (Marx and Pennington 2003). Because many of these pre-service teachers will become teachers at schools with high numbers of students from diverse racial backgrounds, teacher educators must develop conceptual frameworks and instructional methods to help increase pre-service teachers' racial knowledge (Milner 2003; Mosley 2010).

Racial literacy can be a possible strategy to enhance pre-service teachers' racial knowledge (Rogers and Mosley 2008; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). Racial literacy is an interpretive framework that exposes the interwoven structural components of race and racism in both US and global contexts. Racially-literate people understand racism as a persistent problem and consider its various manifestations, socio-historical, socio-economic, and socio-political structures, as salient racial apparatuses. Race, therefore, acts as a 'tool of diagnosis, feedback, and assessment of conditions within society and people's lived experiences' (Skerrett 2011, 314).

This article explores the utility of black history as a heuristic for social studies pre-service teachers to gain racial literacy, which extends the growing literature base on racial literate practices in teacher education (Rogers and Mosley 2008; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). To do this, I developed a critical black history reader that examined race and racism through various historical eras. The components of the program asked the pre-service teachers to read selected materials, provide critical reflections, and integrate their new knowledge within their US history classes. Findings illuminate the racial literacy practices of pre-service social studies teachers and how they negotiated conversations about race and racism within the given official curriculum framework. This research was guided by the following questions:

- (1) How does a black history reader influence social studies pre-service teachers' racial literacy?
- (2) How do social studies pre-service teachers conceptualize racial literacy through teaching black history?

To explore these questions, I examine the literature on racial literacy, highlight the importance of black history as racial literacy, and detail pre-service teachers' classroom narratives.

### **Racial literacy and teacher education**

Legal scholar and critical race theorist, Lani Guinier (2004) coined the term racial literacy in which she argued that the discourse surrounding the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* mischaracterized the lexicon of race and racism. She explained that popular renderings about race and racism centered on notions of racial liberalism, an idea that racism is a psychological and interpersonal challenge that is visible through extreme notions of individual prejudices. Through a racial liberal prism, legally ending racial segregation and colorblind rhetoric would rectify systemic structures of racism. This definition provided for a simplistic explanation about race and racism but did not provide appropriate language that explained the complexity of the social construct.

Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2015) define racial literacy as a 'skill and practice in which individuals are able to discuss the social construction of race, probe the existence of racism and examine the harmful effects of racial stereotyping' (60). Racially-literate people can discern how racism, both subtle and overt, influences the way we read the world and identify racist structures, examine and critique racial hierarchies, and give voice to the experiences of people of color.

Racial literacy explicates three main principles that are grounded in critical race theory, cultural responsive pedagogy, multicultural education, and anti-racism theories. First, race and racism is not static, but represents an evolving, contentious and indistinguishable social construct that is based on local and global contexts through time and space. Second, systems, not individuals, are primarily scrutinized. Individual agency is not ignored but racial literate persons understand that true equality is measured through the elimination of institutional and environmental structures that impede racial progress. Third, intersectionality, which classifies the other identities/social categories of oppression (class, geography, gender, sexualities) of individuals, explains how hegemony reifies itself in society through different forms.

The pedagogy surrounding racial literate teaching is conceptualized as an active and social classroom experience with racial dialogue. Scholars of racial literacy advocate for pre-service teachers to discuss racial issues in an open safe space, read critical texts that explore racial issues, write or journal about race privilege or oppression from personal experiences, be held accountable for practicing racial literacy in field placements, and, when given the opportunity, exert agency to fight against injustices (Mosley 2010; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). These 'moment-to-moment' interactions help shape an interactive process where support for, challenges against and multiple perspectives between pre-service teachers helped them gain more racial literacy (Rogers and Mosley 2008).

### **Racial literacy and social studies education**

While the majority of empirical research on racial literate practices occurs in English education, developing race conscious teachers is a salient concern for the field of social studies education (Brown 2011; Chandler 2015; Crowley and Smith 2015; Epstein 2010; Ladson-Billings 2003; Segall and Garrett 2013). Social studies might be the most appropriate subject for explorations of racial literacy because of its humanistic mission. Social studies asks students who is *human* and what does it mean to be *humane*? (Barton and Levstik 2013). These questions are suitable since socially constructed norms around race 'endorsed the hierarchical division of humanity into superior and inferior races' (Winant 2001, 28).

The social studies field is also a vehicle for civic competence and democratic citizenship education. Since race and racism has historically been a barrier to democratic values, teachers' knowledge and

intellectual processes about race are essential for pedagogies that help students make informed decisions that sustain and improve democracy. Racially-literate social studies teachers take social science concepts and dissect how race influences individuals and groups, and identify racial discourse that uncritically defines what race is, how race is examined, and why race is important. History teachers, more specifically, understand that racial literacy practices are essential in historical thinking because traditional narratives tend to be colorblind, making counter-narratives through both primary and secondary sources key elements through instruction. Racially-literate history teachers also develop a socio-historical knowledge that recognizes not only that race is a historic problem, but that these issues tend to be recursive, evolve and manifest in the present-day.

### **Black history as a racial literacy project**

Black history is useful for exploring racial literacy for four reasons. First, black history is foundational to understanding US racism. Racial classification closely coincided with the establishment and growth of the US colonies in the late eighteenth century. While indigenous groups were the first modern ‘racial other’ within what was to be known as the United States, black people’s need as an exploited labor force led to a social hierarchical system in America based on racial status (Winant 2001). Since enslavement, many aspects of black historical experiences have been and continued to be tied to the legacy of race and racism. Racial apparatuses within the government, schools, and the arts were created to enforce the message of white supremacy and black inferiority. Therefore, the issue of race and black history is interconnected, and to truly comprehend blacks’ involvement in US history is to understand the racial history of the US (Ladson-Billings 2004).

Second, black history is one of the most popular US historical categories in K-12 education. Black history has made major strides within state mandated curriculum, textbooks, and public policy. One national study conducted by Wineburg and Mone-Sano (2008) found that US high school students considered Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman, the most famous figures in US history. Black History Month has become a staple in many schools, communities, and large corporations around the US (King and Brown 2012). Additionally, several states such as Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois have either created legislation or developed state-supported commissions to help with the instruction of teaching black history in public schools.

Third, black history within K-12 context has a dual construction that renders race both visible and invisible. While the visibility of black history in K-12 education has increased, concerns persist over how it is depicted in the official curriculum. State standards and textbooks typically resemble King’s (2004) notion of *marginalizing knowledge*, the selective inclusion of historical narratives through biases and omissions that distort the historical and social reality of minority groups. US race and racism is not explicitly explored; institutional racial structures are largely ignored, and rarely do the curricula highlight contemporary racial experiences. Instead, racism through black history is presented as progressive and as a solved problem.

Similarly, King and Womac (2014) noted this visible/invisible paradigm in their study of black founding fathers presented through the television show, *Founders Friday*. The notion of presenting black founders as central to US history acknowledges their racial seminality, but the active silencing of narratives that describe racial events or how race influenced their positionality and epistemology is how race is rendered invisible. These omissions ‘paradoxically recognizes race yet obscure the function of race’ and serve as a way to ‘avoid rather than directly tackle [racial] issues’ (412–413) in the curriculum (Vasquez-Heilig, Brown, and Brown 2012).

Fourth, black history’s original intent was to serve as a counter hegemonic discourse to racist histories (Dagbovie 2010). Scholars have theorized that black history was more than mere celebrations of exceptional black heroes and heroines and coverage of only key events that ‘shaped’ the black experience (Brown 2010; Dagbovie 2010; Smith and Brown 2014). Instead, teaching and learning black history was and is still about systemically challenging, reclaiming and reinventing blacks’ racial identity – a process called revisionist ontology (Mills 1998). Brown (2010) noted that early constructions of black

history should not be thought of as ‘simply a dialectic relationship where scholars simply identified the problems of textbooks and then added new or positive stories’ (56). Rather, black history’s purpose was to actively contest racial discourse, the racialization of blackness, and how blacks’ personhood was defined in schools and the greater society.

While black history is used as the analytic for racial literacy for this research, other racialized/ethnic histories are appropriate for racial literate teaching. The key element to racially-literate teaching is to understand the racialization process of historical groups. This means that within a racial state such as the US, all historical situated bodies are embedded in race and racism. All histories, therefore, even those considered to be white, when taught critically, using race as diagnosis, can be vehicles for racial literate teaching.

## Methods and methodology

The data represent the instructional component of a larger research study that examined how pre-service teachers read, interpreted and taught black history (King 2014a). This research specifically focused on the student teaching semester of the pre-service teachers. Instrumental case study method (Stake 2000) was used to examine four pre-service teachers’ classroom racial literacy practices with black history curriculum. Purposive sampling (Merriam 2009) was used to select Cynthia, Amelia, Andreas, and Santiago (pseudonyms), who were all undergraduate teacher education students in a dual degree teacher education program of social sciences and social studies at a large Texas research institution (Table 1).

Cynthia and Santiago were recruited during the spring of 2010 and Andreas and Amelia in spring 2011. Cynthia, a white female in her early 20s, was a government major and student-taught 11th grade US History at a large, middle-class suburban high school. Amelia, a white female in her early twenties, was a history major with a minor in education and student-taught AP 11th grade US History at a large, high performing, middle-class suburban high school. Santiago, a 20-year-old newly naturalized Mexican American citizen, student-taught 11th grade US History at a middle-class suburban high school. Andreas, who was in his early twenties, identified himself as an undocumented citizen, taught at a heavily populated and low socio-economic black and Latino school.

I served as their university supervisor and teaching assistant in the senior level social studies methods class. During this time, I became familiar with each pre-service teachers teaching philosophy and their commitment to provide multiple perspective in history. The pre-service teachers understood that the official history curriculum is limited and wanted to provide more nuance in history teaching. Each was concerned with the lack of knowledge they held and felt the summer reading program provided the necessary knowledge to teach about diverse perspectives through a racial lens.

**Table 1.** Participants.

| Participants | Ethnicity/Sex | Major      | Black History knowledge  | Reason to participate   |
|--------------|---------------|------------|--|---|
| Cynthia      | White female  | Government | Limited knowledge  | Learn more and help teach about race.                                 |
| Santiago     | Latino Male   | History    | Limited knowledge  | Better understanding of US history.                                   |
| Amelia       | White Female  | History    | Limited knowledge  | Learn more about the injustices in society and teach to her students. |
| Andreas      | Latino Male   | Government | Limited knowledge but specializes in the Civil Rights Movement | Relate African American history to the immigrant experience.          |

## Black history reader

I designed a reader of critical black history content that explored how race influenced the material conditions of black people throughout history (King 2014a). The readings were part of a summer reading program that began in May and ended in August of 2010 and 2011. Participation was voluntary and while some readings were already part of the teacher education curriculum, the entire reader was not required for methods coursework. The reader served as a way for the pre-service teachers to engage in a critical race curriculum (Yosso 2002) that explored how black history and race intersected. The decision to create a summer reading program independent of the teacher education course was based on a desire to provide the pre-service teachers appropriate space and time to engage heavily with the content and associate pedagogical strategies from the previous semester.

The reading program was named African American History: A Winding River, in honor of Harding's (1981) seminal book, *There is a River: The Struggle for Freedom in America*. Creating the reader involved three steps: consultation with professional historians from highly ranked research institutions, alignment with the Texas state social studies standards, and consideration of the personal and professional interests of the pre-service teachers. I compiled journal articles, book chapters, and primary sources for two readers, based on the specific curriculum plans of each teacher candidate.

A *Winding River 1* (WR1) was comprised of content involving early black history from slavery through Reconstruction. There consisted of three themes: *pedagogical and theoretical foundations of black history, a peculiar institution (slavery), and an American Dilemma and African American response* (Appendix A). A *Winding River 2* (WR2) content involved black history after Reconstruction to present. Three themes comprised it: *pedagogical and theoretical foundations of black history, Reconstruction and the Nadir, and twentieth century/Progressive era* (Appendix B). Amelia was assigned WR1 because she taught portions of Advanced Placement US history, which began from the colonial period through the 2000s. Andreas, Santiago, and Cynthia were given WR2 based on their placements in regular US history classes, which began at Reconstruction (Table 2).

Based on the length of the readers, I advised that they had the option to select texts based on personal and professional interest that would benefit their teaching. Some of the popular readings from WR1 included Jordan's (1986), *White Man's Burden*, Du Bois (2007), *The Souls of Black Folk*, Stevenson's (1993), *Slavery*, and Bennett's (1993), *The Founding of Black America*. Readings from WR2 included Jordan (1986) *White Man's Burden*, Fields' (1990) *Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States*, Du Bois (2007), *The Souls of Black Folk*, Woodson's (1933) *Miseducation of the Negro*, Gilje's (1996), *Rioting in America*, SoRelle's (1983), *The Waco Horror*, Locke's (1925), *The New Negro*, and Hall's (2005), *The Long Civil Rights Movement*.

I wanted the reader to challenge the victimization and heroification narratives typically rendered as black history (King 2014a). The readings were designed to illustrate the collective agency of black communities in achieving democracy. The readings also served as foundational to racial literacy by focusing on how the black experiences was influenced through race and racism. The contents and pre-service teachers' curricular choices from the reader served as major data sources for the study.

## Data sources and analysis

The data sources and analysis all centered on the pre-service teachers' classroom curriculum practices of black history. Data collection occurred during the student teaching semester, a four-month

**Table 2.** African American history: A Winding River content.

| WR1 pre-service teachers' reader                                | WR2 pre-service teachers' reader                                |
|---|---|
| Early colonial – Civil War                                      | Reconstruction – 2000s  |
| Foundations, theoretical considerations and historical identity | Foundations, theoretical considerations and historical identity |
| A peculiar institution  | Reconstruction and Nadir  |
| The American Dilemma  | Twentieth century/Progressive                                   |

process from August to December of 2010 and 2011. To ensure holistic and rigorous interpretations of the findings, I conducted pre- and post-interviews and classroom observations as well as used both audio and video to capture nuances of classroom instruction. I also collected lesson plans, teacher instructional materials, and other curricular documents for analysis.

Before classroom observation began, semi-formal pre-interviews were conducted focusing on pre-service teachers' plans for integrating black history and race through instruction. These interviews lasted for about 10 minutes and generally happened right before the class began. Post-classroom observation interviews occurred after the lesson ended and lasted about 20–30 minutes. The post-interview centered on clarifying questions regarding content taught and allowed for pre-service teacher to reflect on how they represented race and black history through history.

Six to eight classroom observations were conducted. I took detailed observational notes of the lessons, activities, and interactions between the students and teacher. The participants could check the accuracy of research notes, transcriptions, findings, and other data that were extracted throughout the study (Stake 2000). Through this process, the pre-service teachers gave suggestions, cleared up misconceptions, and gave constructive feedback on my writing.

I coded transcripts of interviews and observations and later analyzed them using a constant comparative method (Huberman and Miles 1998). Data analysis consisted of three steps: organizing the data, reducing data into themes, and representing data in figures and tables (Creswell 2002 148). The first step was open coding in which the examination of the data was vast and not bound by rules. Once the initial coding process was finished, I reviewed the documents, assigned the codes, and began conceptualizing categories based on similarities or common themes. Since this was a multiple case study research project, I completed these steps with other data sets acquired through the case study.

Putting the codes in categories organized the data into coherent themes that clarified the phenomena of the cases. The process of analysis required me to examine the various data sources and note the common themes to ensure reliability. From these initial analyses, case studies (Stake 2000) were created for each of the participants. The analysis involved two stages: the within-case study and the cross-case analysis. Analysis began *within* individual cases, where I gathered and analyzed as much information as possible about each case. Once the analysis was sufficient, the cross-case analysis started. This process allowed me to build a general explanation of the phenomena that fit across the case studies.

## **Teachers' curriculum approaches to black history and racial literacy**

Using the principles of racial literacy, the findings are presented through pre-service teachers' classroom narratives. First, I explain how pre-service teachers spoke about the evolution of race as a social construct. The major focus was how race was embedded within US citizenship. Through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case, the pre-service teachers attempted to explain the notion of racial ambiguity and racial complexion and how these constructs were determinate for full citizenship rights. Second, I explain how the pre-service teachers taught notions surrounding systemic racism. The US Constitution was used as a case study to explicate how certain provisions set the foundations of racism in the US. Third, the pre-service teachers approached notions of intersectionality through racial violence. The topics included the lynching of black males and the sexual abuse of black women. Throughout the findings, I note what specific readings from *A Winding River* influenced the pre-service teachers' curriculum decisions.

## **Teaching the social construct of race: *Plessy v. Ferguson***

The social construction of race was a major topic in Cynthia and Santiago's classrooms. Both pre-service teachers illustrated this through their lessons on the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This court case was highlighted because of its influence in jurisprudence concerning the Fourteenth Amendment (Golub 2005) and the Supreme Court precedent of 'separate but equal,' which helped sanction Jim Crow legislation throughout the US. In addition, the document was also part of the reader and both

teachers assigned truncated versions of the case as a reading assignment. *Plessy* became the case study that represented the complexities of US racial classification, what it meant to be black American, and how the legal system promoted racial hierarchies.

Santiago briefly explained the difficulties of defining race and how *Plessy* was significant to race relations in the US. His dialogue about race as a construct emerged through his explanation of the *Plessy* case. He presented a picture of Plessy to the class and asked his students, 'By looking at this picture, what race do you think this man is?' His goal for this question was to elicit views from students on their perceptions concerning race, and show how the outward appearance of a person does not automatically signify racial identity. He told his students that Plessy was considered to have one-eighth African blood, which identified him as black. Santiago questioned the students about race and about the importance of self-identification:

Well, class, if this man [Plessy] does not 'look' black, then what is considered black [he pauses for responses and listens to student responses]? I will be honest with you, I am confused because how can you tell if someone is one-eighth black or white or anything? I know we all hinted that Plessy looks white ... but consider what is race and how does it look today? Is the way they [the Supreme Court] look at race similar to how we look at it today?

Santiago's conversation with his students about Plessy and race was meant to stimulate thought about the complexity and construction of race. He was facilitating a discussion over how the state defines race and the implications of these definitions. Santiago stated, 'I do not know if Plessy identified himself as black or white, but you will see [in future classes] that the US defines racial categories despite how a person looks.' He then asked the question, 'Should we have identifiers such as that? In other words, do we need racial categories?' As the class stumbled to respond, Santiago did not provide any scaffolding; mostly, he left the topic of race, racial classification, and self-identification up for student interpretation.

Cynthia's Plessy lesson was similar to Santiago when she began class by asking, 'What is race?' After a few comments by students, she initiated a discussion about race as a social construct. Cynthia pulled the knowledge she gained from Fields' (1990) *Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America* to explain to her students that race is not a biological trait, which many of her students mentioned through their short discussion:

Race is confusing because just because someone looks a certain way does not make them what you think they are. Race, in many respects, is how society views a person based on outward appearances. I believe [that] we [society] like to create ideas about persons who are different from us.

She continues, 'There is no such thing as race, as we know through our conversation. But the way society has classified certain groups becomes [the] natural way in which we think of things racially.' Cynthia spoke about race in similar terms as Fields:

Not an element of human biology (like breathing oxygen or reproducing sexually); nor is it even an idea (like the speed of light or the value of) that can be plausibly imagined to live an eternal life of its own. Race is not an idea but an ideology. (Fields 1990, 101)

She did not go into the history of racial ideology, but she attempted to help students understand why race is imagined and not biologically accurate. She exhibited a picture of Plessy to her students, asking, 'Now does he look black?' After a pause to receive students' reactions, she said, 'He does not "look" black, maybe biracial? The Supreme Court said he was black enough, not white, to be discriminated against lawfully.' She explained that we in the US have a certain perception of what black looks like, and 'very light skin or half-white does not fit the American construction of the term.'

Cynthia and Santiago both taught lessons about Plessy that underscored how blacks were racialized as second-class citizens. Racialization (Omi and Winant 2014) explains the discursive ways, both cultural and political, in which racial identity is constructed and becomes an identifier for a group of people of similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Persons closely aligned with certain racial myths are affixed and subjugated to those racial meanings (Omi and Winant 2014). However, notions of racialization became more complicated when Cynthia and Santiago exposed Plessy as bi-racial. Cynthia identified that she felt Plessy was half-white or bi-racial, while Santiago mentioned that he was one-eighth black and looked white. Although Cynthia and Santiago did not explain the historical

antecedent of bi-raciality, the complexities of the *Plessy* case helped them explore how race is ambiguous and evolving. The *Plessy* case was a lesson designed to complicate students' understandings about the biological explanations of race.

### Teaching systemic racism: the constitution

Three pre-service teachers, Amelia, Andreas, and Santiago, used lessons about the Constitution to teach about how systemic racism developed in the US. In each class, the Constitution was explained as a document that was created for white wealthy men and excluded black people and indigenous populations. Influential readings included Bennett's (1993) *The Founding of Black America*, Jordan's (1986), *White Man's Burden*, and Fields' (1990) *Slavery, Race, and Ideology*.

Andreas explicitly stated during his discussion on the Constitution, 'Being white was a prerequisite for citizenship. ... let's look at the Naturalization act of 1790.' He talked about 'whiteness' and how full citizenship in the US was systemically tied to racial and ethnic identification or to how close or how distant these groups were to the ideas of whiteness (Lipsitz 2002; Omi and Winant 2014). When a question was raised about oppression of many white immigrant groups and how they compared to black and Latina/os, Andreas told the class, 'Poor whites, white immigrant groups, Japanese and even many Mexicans were able to claim white because of their skin color but blacks could not. ... They also had to essentially give up, at least publically, their culture.' Andreas described how the US systemically constructed blacks as racialized citizens and encouraged other historically marginalized people to move towards the dominant culture's ideology. Blackness became the distinct opposite of white, which was regarded as the proper representation of US citizenry.

Andreas provided examples of how whiteness and blackness were binaries to the ideas of full citizenship. His argument centered on how black skin became synonymous with second-class citizenship. Andreas explained:

There needed to be a justification for slavery, Jim Crow laws, and lynching. The solution was to continue to paint blacks as bad people, not deserving of full citizenship. In fact, once blacks were free, some institutions [jobs] continued to perpetrate the same level of slave mentality, such as sharecropping. ... In fact, the Constitution did not apply to blacks as they were still looked at as slaves, or at least not full citizens.

Andreas' analysis identified the US as a racial state (Goldberg 1993), which defines how race influences how the nation-state operates as a mechanism that drives discrimination through various social, political, and economic sites. Andreas mentioned, 'To limit citizenship was a strategy to uphold whiteness as the standard of civic virtue.' Andreas made an argument that black skin was an automatic identifier for second-class citizenship in the US, and that blacks were not quintessential citizens based on their separation from whiteness. As he later proclaimed, the 'black codes were developed to continue to limit the citizenship rights of blacks and to extend white social, political, and economic dominance.'

Andreas also connected the black codes to the contemporary issue of Latinos in the Southwest. He stated, 'The black codes that we study in history is similar to Latinos showing their identification in places like Arizona today! ... As you can see, the US has a history of second-guessing citizenship for persons of color!' Andreas echoes Charles Mills (1997) notion of a racial contract in the US, in which 'whites regulate, control, and construct the moral and judicial standards of citizenship' (Brown, Crowley, and King 2011) while for non-whites, white men represent the ideal or prototypical American citizens.

Amelia's lesson about black citizenship was much more focused on the topic of the three-fifths clause of the Constitution. The three-fifths clause was a provision during the Second Constitutional Convention in 1787 that resolved the conflict between northern and southern delegates about whether or not enslaved blacks should be regarded as persons or property for taxation and Congressional representative purposes. Within the clause were provisions that included ending the transatlantic slave trade in 1808 and the Fugitive Slave Act that made it a law to return escaped slaves in the north back to the south.



Amelia's class session was devoted to trying to connect the three-fifths clause with the dehumanization of blacks as second-class citizens. She begins her class:

A clause such as this [three-fifths clause] is an example of how the institution of slavery continued to make someone less than a person. [This clause] took blacks' alienable rights and was used as justification to treat people a certain way to be considered property. The big concept we will speak of is dehumanization and its effects on citizenship in the US.

Amelia believed that the three-fifths clause was representative of the original foundations of US policy that purposefully excluded blacks from the body politic, explaining that 'This provision is just a small sample of the many instances that kept blacks from living the American dream, one that was foundational by federal law.'

Similarly, Santiago approached citizenship and race by explaining the various ways that citizenship was denied to blacks to sustain racial hierarchy. He began his class with these words:

We will begin today by examining the various ways the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments were consequently reversed after reconstruction policies failed in the US. We will examine how blacks were coerced by fear to continue in a subservient role as second-class citizens. Citizenship rights such as voting were restricted through poll taxes and other means. Laws were created that promoted separate but equal, as we know was not equal.

He highlighted a matrix that identified various southern states and voting restrictive laws such as the grandfather clause, property tests, literacy tests, and poll taxes. He showed his students how Southern lawmakers circumvented laws in order to prevent blacks from voting, therefore continuing to restrict their citizenship. Santiago's theme of blacks' second-class citizenship asked his students to examine the institutional practices that restricted the racial group. He tied restrictive voting laws to the lack of political attainment by blacks. In other words, blacks could not vote for their interests, and therefore took longer to achieve political success and social mobility. Santiago articulated that voting through the civic process was the most important freedom for citizens and the most effective means to achieve equality. Therefore, since the ideas of race helped create a social status hierarchy, political mobility was denied for the fear that a truly democratic process would see blacks working to improve US democracy through the political process, thus endangering white interests.

Amelia, Andreas, and Santiago used the Constitution as a way to construct a larger discussion around systemic racism. Racialized citizens were not considered in the Constitution, and the pre-service teachers wanted their students to understand that notion. Andreas stated it best during a post-interview: 'It is important that we stop this idea that the original intent of the founding fathers was to liberate everyone.' Andreas connects with, as does Ladson-Billings (2004), an epistemology of citizenship where different versions of citizenship are recognized.

### Teaching intersectionality: racial violence

Amelia, Santiago and Cynthia spent considerable class time discussing racial violence against black Americans. The pre-service teachers indicated that Gilje's (1996), *The Tragedy of Race*, SoRelle's (1983), *The Waco Horror*, and Stevenson's (1993) *Slavery* were the influential texts that inspired the teaching of gendered differences of racial violence. Amelia's class session centered on socio-sexual experience of black women while teaching a lesson on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings. Santiago and Cynthia spent class time discussing black male lynching throughout the US.

Amelia was the only pre-service teacher who explicitly intertwined the concepts of race, racial violence, and sex. She did by teaching about Thomas Jefferson's sexual exploits with his black female slave and fathering a few children. While conducting her lesson on the 'founding fathers,' she explained, 'I have seen documentaries about Jefferson and how he loved his slave, I believe her name is Sally Hemming. What I have studied about these "relationships" was that they were mostly one-sided and dominated by the slave master and not of love.'

Short of saying rape in the classroom because she was fearful of backlash of parents, Amelia attempted to describe the levels of racial citizenship by highlighting the privilege of white men who

committed sexual assault crimes and the dehumanization of black women and families who were deemed as property. Offspring of these 'unions' were typically still considered slaves, and by law were considered to be black persons, despite their father's heritage. She continued in class, 'I believe that some of these children were claimed by these men, some were house servants, sent elsewhere for education, but many were treated just like the other slaves, as property, not people.'

Amelia told the class that rape of black females meant more than ownership of the body but also ownership of the family. The family reference was Amelia's attempt to explain how race and power intersected with both male and female. As stated in Stevenson's (1993) article, the slave masters identified slave families as only mother and child, therefore excluding black fathers. The master employed himself as the head of the plantation, and superseded slave home life by exerting his sexual power over slave families. Through rape, breeding practices between black males and females, and child rearing, the master propagated sexual and racial violence. For black women, they had little to no control over their body and their femininity.

Santiago taught racial violence through black male lynching, ironically described as the mechanism to maintain a just society. He began class by presenting short lectures around the historical context of lynching. Their instruction focused on how black men were considered both physically and sexually dangerous. Santiago mentioned that black men were considered 'Bucks' and described them as physically intimidating men who white slave owners were scared to lose control over. Santiago used data from Ida B. Wells' (1895) *The Red Record* as a point of analysis about the amount of violence extended to African Americans in the US. He created two timelines based on the data from *The Red Record*. He then juxtaposed data on lynching with other major historical events such as the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, the Klan Act, Jim Crow laws that were passed, and black migration to the north. The two timelines were compared to illustrate how these racially charged events coincided with violence towards African Americans.

Santiago also used the Omaha courthouse lynching for students to interpret and analyze a specific lynching picture. Santiago asked, 'Why is lynching important to cover?' He scaffolded his students' thinking by directing them back to the lessons taught about citizenship and how African Americans were considered second-class citizens based on racial ideology. He then related that the aggressiveness of lynching (hanging of bodies, burning, gun shots) served as a form of social control for African Americans. He said:

If we look at these pictures [of lynching] it is scary and seemed to be a personal attack on black men. If you were a black man during this time, this could be your reality. In essence, lynching was used as a sort of reminder [of your subjugated place in society] if you stepped out of line.

Santiago's comment about black males 'stepping out of line' reminded students of the rules of race that existed in society, rules that placed whites in a privileged position as ideal representations of citizens. The lynching visually advanced these ideologies through public terrifying and humiliating motifs (Gilje 1996; Goldsby 2006). His comment that lynching was used, 'especially [for] crimes against white people' could be interpreted as justice for the supposed rape of white women. White men and the community saw lynching as an avenue to (re-)inscribe 'white masculinity supremacy' (Wiegman 1993, 446) and protect the virtue of the white woman by punishing black males who were accused of violating white female bodies.

Amelia and Santiago were ambitious with their racial violence lesson focusing on the socio-sexual experiences of black women and the lynching of black males. They emphasized that lynching was a national phenomenon and not only a southern problem. The lynching pictures showed in their classes all represented northern states. They also highlighted that government dealt passively with issues of lynching, which allowed these acts of aggression against blacks to go unpunished and become a national epidemic (Gilje 1996; Goldsby 2006). Amelia presented to her class that rape was racial violence and often neglected history in K-12 education. The lynching pictures in Santiago class elicited a lot of emotion, as it was difficult for some students to look at the images. The pre-service teachers taught that the black body was not used only as labor but also a source for pleasure, entertainment, and anger.

## Discussion and implications

The pre-service teachers' racial literacy practice focused on early conceptions of US citizenship and its relationship towards blacks. They guided students in exploring this by emphasizing socially constructed notions of race through *Plessy v. Ferguson*, how systemic racism developed through the Constitution, and gendered forms of oppression through sexual and physical racial violence. Similar to the English and Humanities teachers in Skerrett's (2011) and Epstein and Gist's (2013) studies, the pre-service teachers challenged, critiqued, and extended the history curriculum that provides cursory treatment of black history and race.

The pre-service teachers indicated that *A Winding River* was extremely influential with curriculum development when thinking through black historical experiences with race and racism and in establishing a race teaching lexicon. If compared with the limited way history curriculum is devised, the pre-service teachers' racial knowledge from *A Winding River* was foundational to building racial literacy in their classrooms. As several studies (Ladson-Billings 2003) have indicated, race and racism in social studies is not treated as multilayered; however, these pre-service teachers were able to introduce high school students to some intricacies regarding the concepts. Yet, when examining the data source more thoroughly, *A Winding River* had mixed results in terms of developing critical racial literate curriculum (Mosley 2010) and teaching practices for the pre-service teachers.

### A new way to look at race

An important positive with *A Winding River* was its influence on reconceptualizing what can be considered as racial topics. Although the classroom topics are typically taught in high school classrooms (Brown and Brown 2010; Ladson-Billings 2003), the pre-service teachers indicated that the reader helped them recognize the obscure positioning of race in the curriculum. As Vasquez-Heilig, Brown, and Brown (2012) described, the Texas standards rarely explicitly identify racial topics in the curriculum, leaving race present but ambiguous.

For example, Amelia's notion of racial violence through rape was something developed through her readings about Thomas Jefferson and Stevenson's slavery article. The diplomatic figure of Jefferson, the institution of slavery, and racial violence are all prominent in the history curriculum (Brown and Brown 2010) but notions of black women, rape and sexual violence are not. The idea of slavery from a woman's point-of-view brought a new conflicting knowledge about the institution and the female body. *Slavery* focused on how slave masters controlled almost every aspect of slave family life, including the female body, and Amelia realized that Jefferson's transgressions with Sally Hemming represented power and hinted at the psychological influences of the race. The socio-sexual experiences of black women were much more about white male privilege and power through sex. In other words, the socio-sexual experience of black women is representative to notions of black inferiority and dehumanization.

### Racial terminology

The reader also helped the pre-service teachers articulate certain forms of racial terminology. For example, race as a social construct was previously known by all the pre-service teachers but the ability to represent the concept with notions of systemic racism was aided by the reader. When Cynthia and Santiago discussed *Plessy v. Ferguson* in terms of the one-drop rule, justice system and government, they attempted to convey to their classes that US racial ideology was socially constructed to maintain hegemony and social hierarchies. Andreas advanced the topic further by expressing that certain racial and ethnic groups moved between racial categories. By admitting that white ethnic groups, the Japanese, and Latina/os were able to claim white, Andreas further solidified the ambiguity of race and highlighted the levels of citizenship. In essence, they challenged their students to question the meaning of black and white and the role bi-racial people fit within a neat racial dichotomy created by the government for citizenship purposes.

## Re-inscribing the marginalization of race

While concepts of racial literacy were taught through black history, the teaching also re-inscribes race marginalization in the curriculum. Further examination of lesson plans and post-observation interviews revealed that the classes that I observed were typically the only times when black history and race was taught. Andreas dedicated one class period, Amelia devoted three lessons, and Santiago and Cynthia taught two class out of an entire 18-week semester of study. This may have been related to curriculum constraints and the belief that teaching about race is in addition to not as part of regular US history teaching. The goal of racial literacy and *A Winding River*, however, was to demonstrate the continuity of race and permanence of the black experiences throughout US history. The placement of black history within certain historical eras and events reinforces the misinformation that black people are ‘relatively insignificant to the growth and development of our democracy’ (Ladson-Billings 2003). The purpose was to provide the pre-service teachers with the knowledge to be able to move beyond the popular and limited approach of how blacks are constructed in the curriculum.

Additionally, the pre-service teachers focused on oppressive elements of US institutions and government functions but largely ignored black agency in obtaining or developing their own guidelines for citizenship. Andreas, in his post-interview, lauded the fact that ‘minorities have different ideas and experiences than whites, which influenced their ideas about citizenship.’ Save for Andreas, the pre-service teachers did not acknowledge or interrogate how blacks fought back or created alternative realities, and Andreas’ ideas were not referenced in his teaching. While interrogating how race was used as a mechanism to deny citizenship is important in helping understanding institutional barriers, being racially literate is about interrogating concepts of power and privilege. Ignoring black agency leads to a narrow understanding of the complexity of citizenship in US black communities where they established their own structures and believed that economic, educational, political, and social freedom defined their citizenship (King 2014b).

Lastly, race-based classroom discourse lacked intersections of other forms of oppression such as gender, class, and geography. While Amelia attempted to provide commentary about black women’s socio-sexual experiences during slavery, the pre-service teachers did not engage in a classroom discourse that explored the other dimensions of black ontology. By limiting intersectionality, the students do not get to explore that nuance in learning about complex intergroup aspects of race and racism. Race and racism looks different based on class, gender, sexuality, and geography and by examining the ‘full range of racialized inequalities’ (Guinier 2004), students’ racial literacy would be enhanced even further.

## Conclusion

For social studies teacher education, our goal for our pre-service teachers is to enable them to be conduits for social transformation. With appropriate racial literate practices, this can be achieved. Critical race literacy in traditional history classes changes its trajectory and provides space for counter narratives to be underscored in classrooms. The nexus of race and black history alters the course of progressive narratives and situates US history as ugly, convoluted, complex, and incomplete because those narratives highlight racial issues as historic, subversive, and permanent fixtures in society.

It is not clear, however, to what extent racial literacy is being developed in social studies teacher education programs. Generally, in teacher preparation, education students take one class that explicitly deals with notions of multiculturalism and sociocultural knowledge (Brown and Kraehe 2010; Gorski 2009). Secondary social studies teacher education is normally embedded within social science departments at universities but it is doubtful that the majority of them take advantage of Ethnic Studies courses that can aid in developing racial literacy. This is confirmed by Espenshade and Radford’s (2009) study that revealed that 80% of whites, who are the largest demographic of social studies teachers (Busey and Waters 2015), do not enroll in Ethnic Studies courses.

In this study, save for Andreas, the pre-service teachers did not take any Ethnic Studies courses as undergraduates. Ethnic studies teaches critical US history that centers ethnic groups as the historical interpreters, examines the history and contemporary transgressions of US colonialism and racism, exposes ethnic group agency in combating oppression, and investigates communal identities and creativities (Sleeter 2011). Therefore, the importance of these subjects not only enhances content knowledge but also provides a sophisticated racial literacy that heightens recognition of historically marginalized groups that maybe helpful for being more culturally relevant to students of color (Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015).

Although I would agree that to *know is not enough* (Ball 2012), many pre-service teachers, because of past education, simply lack racial literacy. The cultivation of knowledge does matter; particularly, as a starting point in helping pre-service teachers develop an inclusive, multicultural, and equitable history curriculum. Knowledge influences action, frameworks, and interpretations that teachers will bring into the history classroom. With that, teacher educators will need to be able to help scaffold this new knowledge and help provide a nexus to pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

It is up to social studies teacher education programs to design and/or integrate racial frameworks in course work to ensure that pre-service teachers develop racial literacy. For example, many programs require students to devise curriculum unit plans as a cumulative project to assess mastery in long range curriculum planning. A racial literate curriculum unit plan in social studies education can focus on black history or any other historically marginalized group. Pre-service teachers should select units of study that are part of the official curriculum but the lesson narratives should exclusively be on the black historical experience.

All lesson plans should show how black history within that era highlights the evolution of race and racism, institutional racism, and intersectionality. These themes are explicated throughout the entire unit plan and informed by state standards. The pre-service teachers then will examine the official curriculum and make cases as to why this knowledge is feasible in their classrooms based on the verbiage and construction of the standards.

Racial literacy helps pre-service teachers trace, address and possibly devise action against persistent racial issues. With this knowledge, pre-service social studies teachers can enhance the official curriculum by devising lessons that explore and expose race and its many manifestations in history and other social sciences that can aid in creating a more equitable society.

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## Appendix A. Early African American history – slavery through reconstruction.

| Foundations, theoretical considerations and historical identity  | A peculiar Institution  | An American Dilemma and African American response  |
|--|---|--|
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## Appendix B. African American history after reconstruction to the present.

| Foundations and theoretical orientations in African American history  | Reconstruction and the Nadir   | Twentieth century/Progressive era   |
|---|--|---|
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