Abstract

This study analyzes 20 long-form interviews with public high school history teachers to explore how they teach about anti-Black racism, slavery, and racial inequality amid public contention. Previous research on how teachers respond to curricular challenges shows that educators bend little to the concerns of outsiders. This is borne out in the current research which finds that U.S. history teachers have a shared identity that informs a focus on learning goals for students and the logistical constraints of teaching in public schools. There is evidence of regional divisions between history teachers in northern and southern states, but there are also crosscutting complexities that complicate these divisions. In fact, across a range of differences such as urban rural location and the racial and ethnic composition of schools, teachers bend as little as possible to conservative critics. When we include teachers' voices in current debates about U.S. history, we discover a vast divide between the practical, on-the-ground concerns of teachers and the ideological concerns which non-educators espouse. The interviewed teachers try to operate above the political fray. This is important because U.S. history teachers collectively have agency and can shape historical discourse and national knowledge.

Teachers not Preachers: Teaching U.S. History amid Civic Divisions

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A thesis submitted to the Sociology Department of Mount Holyoke College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with honors.

Mount Holyoke College

South Hadley, Massachusetts

2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to give a huge thank you to Professor Eleanor Townsley for advising me throughout the development of this thesis. Thank you for providing support from the very beginning of my brainstorming process last spring through the culmination of this writing. I am immensely appreciative of the ways you have pushed me to consider new ideas and believed in me as a researcher. Thank you for your feedback on my many drafts and all of the time you spent speaking with me. I am grateful for your unending support and encouragement.

Thank you to my two committee members, Professor Ben Gebre-Medhin and Professor Kathy Forde. You both provided valuable support to me in this process. Thank you for talking with me about my project in its early stages and providing helpful feedback on my draft of the thesis. I appreciate your willingness to share your insights and perspectives into the topics of my thesis with me.

Thank you as well to Professor Ken Tucker for speaking with me while I was brainstorming for this thesis last spring. I also want to express gratitude to my former history teachers, Mr. Sak, Mr. Poirier, and my dad and U.S. history teacher, Mr. Castner, for allowing me to practice and develop my interview questions with you. Thank you for sharing your time and experiences.

I would also like to acknowledge those who have assisted in my writing process. Thank you to my mom for answering my many grammatical and sentence structure questions and my brother for brainstorming titles with me. I am grateful to Zoe Greenberg for working with me in the SAW Center on many occasions. Thank you as well to my friends and family who have listened to me talk about this thesis as it developed.

Most importantly, I am indebted to the twenty U.S. history teachers who volunteered to be interviewed for this project. Thank you for willingly sharing your thoughts, perspectives, and insights with me, a stranger. I am grateful for your commitment to student learning. Without you this project would not have been possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States is currently embroiled in a debate over national histories of anti-Black racism, slavery, and racial inequality and how they connect to the idea of America. These arguments have spilled into the field of public education as Americans argue about what students should learn in their U.S. history classes, creating a practical dilemma for teachers. Thomas, for example, teaches U.S. history in rural Florida and reports that he wants to be "as forthcoming and as fair and as open" as possible when discussing all aspects of U.S. history, including slavery and racial inequality. Thomas starts his U.S. history curriculum with the Reconstruction Era. Because he dwells on the gross injustices of the past, at the beginning of one year, one of Thomas's students asked whether he loves America. Thomas told me in an interview, "I was like 'whoa.' I wasn't expecting to get that question." Initially thrown off guard, this question caused Thomas to reflect upon if he "comes across as cynical to the point of being 'un-American'?" Thomas, however, responded to his student, "Well, yes, I absolutely love America. As a matter of fact, I love America so much that I'm going to call us out on the stupid things that we've done in the past, so that we won't do them again." At its core, this exchange illustrates two ideas about how national history should be understood: one seeks to ignore or downplay the fundamental injustices of the past and the other aims to acknowledge them.

This thesis considers the ways high school U.S. history teachers, like Thomas, respond to contemporary debates about U.S. history education, the 1619 Project, and American values of equality and justice. In many cases these arguments track political divisions. Liberals want to better understand how past injustices affect the present and conservatives argue that dwelling on

racial injustice is divisive, an insult to the nation, and unnecessary in the context of American exceptionalism.[1] Yet building upon prior research on curricular challenges, education reforms, and professional identity, I find that teachers try to operate above this political fray. Overall, I argue that U.S. history teachers' professional identity informs their response to these current debates about U.S. history as they try to hold fast to their values of supporting student learning.

The 1619 Project and History Education Debates

One prominent example of current debates about U.S. history education that inspired this study is the 1619 Project. The 1619 Project launched through a magazine issue published in August 2019 by the prestigious, national newspaper, *The New York Times*. The project aims to reframe American history by centering the stories of Black Americans and the legacy of slavery. The magazine issue of the 1619 Project includes essays, poetry, and photography with titles such as: "American Capitalism is Brutal. You Can Trace That to the Plantation," "Why is Everyone Always Stealing Black Music," "How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam," and "Why Doesn't America Have Universal Healthcare? One Word: Race." This release saw demand for print copies of the *New York Times Magazine* issue soar (Serwer, 2019). Nikole Hannah-Jones, who conceived the idea for the 1619 Project, won a Pulitzer Prize for her opening essay.[2] Additionally, the Pulitzer Center[3] partnered with the *New York Times* to create lesson plans to accompany the project.

At the same time, the project immediately received backlash. Socialist critics argued the project focused too much on race (Niemuth et al., 2019). A few well-known historians published

[1] While not every conservative espouses these beliefs, in the remainder of this thesis, I refer to these debates in terms of the conservative critics and challengers who seek to downplay critical accounts of the role of slavery and race in U.S. history.
[2] The 1619 Project expanded into a multimedia and multiyear project to include a podcast series, two books, and work on a Hulu docuseries. This study, however, mainly focuses on the initial magazine issue released in 2019.
[3] The Pulitzer Center is a news organization which sponsors reporting on underreported issues.

their disagreements with some of the historical arguments of the project as well. Additionally, prominent Republican politicians quickly became the most vocal critics of the 1619 Project. They reinforced and represented their constituents beliefs that the project is a "racially divisive, revisionist account of history that denies the noble principles of freedom & equality on which our nation was founded" (Cotton, 2020b). Former President Donald Trump responded to the 1619 Project with the creation of the 1776 Commission which aimed to "restore understanding of the greatness of the American founding" (1776 Commission, 2021).[4] Republican Senator Tom Cotton introduced legislation in the Senate to withhold federal funding from schools using the 1619 Project (Arnold and Collins Atkinson, 2021). In addition, at least 36 states, including Florida and Georgia which are featured in this study, initiated legislation to restrict education on racism and bias in public schools. A few states' legislation explicitly or implicitly banned teaching the 1619 Project. In contrast, 17 other states, including Illinois which is also highlighted in this study, are trying to increase education on these topics (Stout & Wilburn, 2021).

Considering how teachers respond to debates about using the 1619 Project in classrooms was a starting point for my research. I ended up, however, focusing more broadly on public school teacher response to disputes surrounding how much emphasis should be placed on America's "original sin" of slavery, the continued disadvantages Black Americans face, and who gets to make these curricular decisions. The rest of this chapter identifies the arenas in which curriculum is frequently contested, considers the literature on how educators respond to curricular challenges, touches upon literature on professional identity, and reviews factors that affect whether a proposed education reform becomes reality. Overall, these literatures show

[4] The 1776 Commission included 18 conservative activists, politicians, and intellectuals – none of whom are professional historians of the United States (Crowley & Schuessler, 2021).

collectively that change occurs slowly in classrooms and that teachers have influence over their work environments and the types of reforms they support. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of this project's methodology and an overview of the remainder of the thesis.

Sites of Curricular Contention

While my study centers on public high school teachers' responses to public sphere curricular challenges around slavery and anti-Black racism, below I provide a brief review of curricular contention at other sites to illuminate the multiple dimensions of debates. Curricular challenges, such as the present ones on teaching anti-Black racism, can take place (1) surrounding the physical materials used for teaching (2) within educational governance and its legislative and bureaucratic bodies and (3) in the public sphere (Rojas, 2015).

Curricular Conflict Surrounding Teaching Materials

In the arena of U.S. history education, there have been long standing debates about textbooks – the most common physical teaching material in the classroom. There are numerous studies on the particular narratives textbooks promote (Loewen, 2008; VanSledright, 2008) and the context in which they were written (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Recent research on U.S. history textbooks concludes that they have added the stories of more racially and ethnically diverse Americans over the past century. These changes often take place after extended public debate surrounding textbook content (Zimmerman, 2002). At the same time, however, U.S. history textbooks still promote a narrative that the United States has progressed steadily over time as it overcomes past challenges and inequalities (Tyack, 2003; VanSledright, 2008). Consequently, the change brought about by textbook wars, as many scholars dub them, are minor and symbolic rather than transformational.

The finding that U.S. history textbooks promote a rosy image of U.S. history is

significant. Yet, if we only look at textbooks and do not study what teachers do in the classroom, we have an incomplete picture of the learning that occurs in schools. Only 13 percent of public school twelfth-grade students report never reading outside materials in their U.S. history classes and 36 percent of students read material outside the textbook at least once a week (*National Assessment of Educational Progress*, 2010). My study adds to the insight of history textbook studies by including the perspective of history teachers' experiences and choices about contested teaching materials, including the 1619 Project.

Curricular Conflict in Governing Bodies

Other research surrounding curricular conflict considers how challengers work through educational governing bodies like state legislatures and local school boards to advance their agendas. Educational historians chronicle these debates (e.g., Nash et al., 2000; Symcox, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002) and sociologists analyze the political and cultural tactics challengers use to make their case (Binder, 2002). In a foundational work in this field, Binder (2002) draws from theories about social movements to describe how, in some cases, members of oppositional groups mobilize the public to pressure school boards. Since social movement activists often do not have direct access to policy decision makers, they work to encourage the media and the public to care about their concerns. Ultimately, they have the goal of generating enough influence that officials will adopt their policy changes. Binder (2002) builds upon this traditional social movement model by also discussing how curricular challengers pressure actors within educational institutions directly. In the current case of controversy over U.S. history education, state and national politicians have taken up the cause and conservative challengers have run for school board positions and threatened teachers directly and sometimes violently.

Curricular Conflict in the Public Sphere

Lastly, conversations occur in the public sphere surrounding what information students should learn in public schools. Intellectuals, the media, and politicians discuss what they believe should and should not be taught to children (Rojas, 2015). My study lies in this space of contention and seeks to address teachers' responses to public conversations about education values. Teachers' and students' voices are often absent from public conversations about history education, but "[e]ducational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that" (Fullan, 2001, p. 115). By speaking directly with teachers and bringing their voices to bear on current debates, I endeavor to highlight the values, stated practices, and views of public high school U.S. history teachers. Specifically, my research seeks to fill this absence in current debate about teaching history by addressing the question: *What do U.S. history teachers' perspectives add to public sphere narratives about teaching past and present race relations in public high schools?*

Educator Response to Challenges, Professional Identity, and Education Reform

In response to these different types of curricular challenges, researchers largely find that professional educators do not bend to the will of outsiders. Despite many attempts at reforming the education system, it is static; incremental change occurs at a slow pace (Tyack & Cuban, 2009). Professional educators respond in a variety of ways when challenged. Sometimes they resist curricular challenges directly. Other times they make early symbolic concessions that they eventually roll back. Conversely, educators are more amenable to curricular challengers' demands if challengers frame their concerns in line with the already-existing objectives of school personnel (Binder, 2002; Camicia, 2009). In particular, curricular challenges surrounding race-related topics, such as civil rights and Afrocentric curriculum, tend to find more support and success in schools with more students of color (Binder, 2002; Cunningham & Rondini, 2017).

Binder (2002) partly attributes educators bending little to outside challengers to ideas from new institutional theory about organizational change. Old institutional theory emphasizes how organization leaders concede to constituents' demands for political reasons. In contrast, new institutional theory stresses the ways the expectations and culture of an organizational sector influence those who work within it. Following ideas from this theory, in my study, I examine the ways teachers conceive of their work and professional identity as educators in the United States. Each teacher is "embedded in a larger institutional network of American education, in which particular forms of shared culture influenced professional educators' decision making" (Binder, 2002, p. 22). Hence, to understand teacher response to curricular challenges, we need to understand their shared professional values and working environment.

The study of teachers' professional identities provides a framework to engage with their approach to their chosen occupation and what they do when their occupation comes under fire from outsiders. In particular, literature on professional identity contends that those within a profession develop shared rules, cultures, and procedures that guide their actions (Lamont, 2009). In the face of considerable challenge to and within one's occupation, Lipsky (1971) identifies that "street-level bureaucrats" – meaning those who represent the American government to citizens, such as teachers – develop strategies to simplify decision making and engage defense mechanisms. These strategies serve to make their jobs manageable. Additionally, in the face of education reform, researchers found that teachers prioritize securing their work environment by minimizing added responsibilities rather than openly embracing changes to their work flow (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Overall, the above collective strategies which teachers engage in both emerge from and shape their teaching experiences.

The professional identity literature also shows that teachers' identities are shaped by their

specific teaching contexts; that is, they are "comprised of multiple personal and contextual variables situated within a particular milieu" (Bosso, 2014, p. 88). Studies on education reform implementation share this concern with contextual factors which affect schools. Given that educators often do not respond positively to curriculum challenges, but that real curricular change still does occur, reform implementation researchers study the factors which influence whether a proposed reform becomes a reality. [5] This is of importance because it is only in the process of actual implementation of a reform, rather than stated adoption, that any proposed curricular change can begin to affect students learning.

As I talk to teachers about their classrooms, I borrow from Fullan (2001) to consider how the interaction of three factors – characteristics of a proposed reform, local characteristics of a school and school district, and factors external to a school – relate to the success of an educational change.[6] Since there is no single reform at issue in my study but rather debate about teaching the history of racial inequality and slavery, I mainly focus on local characteristics of a school and external factors as they shape the way teachers conceive of their roles amid contention surrounding U.S. history. Local factors relate to district, community, principal and teacher characteristics. External factors include but are not limited to the cultural and political contention surrounding efforts like the 1619 project or changing textbooks. In addition, Cunningham and Rondini's (2017) analysis of curricular reform in Mississippi points to the way curricular change is path dependent on local histories and characteristics. I also explore this in my study, asking*: How do the local school, community, and district environments surrounding*

[5] Much of this literature focuses on education reform coming from governmental policy and not challenges from parents or within the public sphere, but there is reason think that the same factors shape the implementation or reforms regardless of their source.
[6] At the level of the proposed reform itself, Fullan identifies if there is a need for the change and the clarity, complexity, and quality/practicality of the change. See Fullan (2001, p. 72) for a more thorough description of these factors and an image of their interaction.

U.S. history teachers affect their views on history education and how they teach about race relations in the United States?

Methods

To answer my two research questions, I conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with public high school U.S. history teachers in 2021. Teachers' voices are often overlooked in the public sphere where they are treated as the objects rather than the subjects of analysis. There are costs, though, to not talking to teachers. Since teachers put educational theory and legislation into practice, they are the ones with the most direct influence on what children learn on any given day. By not talking to educational practitioners, we miss seeing the classroom context of learning where public sphere conversations become a reality.

Interviews particularly have the potential to reveal the perspectives of teachers more fully than a survey or quantitative analysis. Open-ended interviews allowed me to probe teachers' thoughts and practices in some depth and to ask interview questions related directly to my research topic. In some cases, I followed lines of inquiry that the teachers mentioned which were unique to each teacher. For instance, I discovered aspects of teachers' identities which I had not gone into the study looking for, but which emerged as deeply relevant for considering teaching choices amid contention. In studying how teachers describe their classroom practices, I hope to tell previously untold stories about U.S. history teachers values and clarify the connection between the teaching environment and teaching practices surrounding race issues.

Due to the evidence of regional differences in U.S. history class content which I examine in chapter 2 (Duncan et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2020; Zimmerman, 2002), I invited teachers from several states for interviews. To ensure I found some teachers who used the 1619 Project, I first contacted teachers in Chicago and Buffalo where school districts have formally adopted the 1619

Project. I received no response from Buffalo teachers, but several teachers in Chicago responded to my invitation. I did not only want to talk with teachers whose district required them to teach the 1619 Project, however, because district-level adoption arguably insulates teachers from wider public debate and criticism. For this reason, after beginning to interview Chicago teachers, I reached out to teachers in other areas of Illinois. In addition, I contacted teachers in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Texas, states which have proposed or passed legislation to restrict teaching about racism and/or bias in their schools (Stout & Wilburn, 2021). This makes these states ideal for revealing the possible impact of curricular contention about race on history teachers' values. I received responses from teachers in Florida and Georgia, so I focused my outreach on teachers in those states. Within states, urban and rural populations often differ in racial composition and political views (Parker et al., 2018), so I also sought teachers from suburban and rural areas as well as cities. In the final analysis, I interviewed teachers in Florida, Georgia, and Illinois and from rural, suburban, and urban areas within each state. See Appendix 1 for teachers' locations and personal demographics along with the pseudonyms I gave them.

After receiving approval for the project from the Institutional Review Board at Mount Holyoke College, I began interviewing high school U.S. history teachers in August 2021. I interviewed one to two teachers a week through November 2021. To find teachers, I first created a list of public high schools in the states in question using the National Center for Education Statistics database. I subsequently visited the staff directories of each school's website. If it listed an educator as teaching U.S. history, I emailed them with an interview request.[7] I emailed approximately 20 teachers a week and ultimately contacted 235 U.S. history teachers. I interviewed 20 teachers who responded to me, meaning 8.5 percent of invited teachers

[7] I did not email social studies teachers in general to simplify the email request and narrow my focus.

participated in my study.

Of the twenty interviews, I conducted fifteen over the phone or video call while five interviewees requested to complete a written questionnaire. Interviews ranged between thirty and seventy-five minutes. See Appendix 2 for interview question guidelines. I transcribed each interview conducted over Zoom using Zoom's audio transcription function and the interviews I conducted over the phone and Google Meet with Otter.ai transcription services. I then manually edited the transcripts for accuracy.

As I conducted the interviews, I read through each transcript initially and created summary codes for the teacher's responses. These codes were mostly in vivo, meaning I used the words of the participants for my codes. The summary codes provided "a label that represents what passages of data are about" and help to connect quotes to each other (Bazeley, 2013, p. 128). I subsequently coded all the responses to each major question I asked, such as what teachers want students to come away with after lessons on the history of slavery, how teachers respond to national commentaries on the teaching of U.S. history, the teacher's use of the 1619 Project, and how teachers address current events in class. These codes were labels of the topics the teachers were discussing. I coded these without looking at which teacher made which comments to try to minimize any pre-conceived ideas I had about education in different places.

Using the codes I found from each major interview question, I created eight categories of conversation: (1) teacher identities and beliefs (2) general goals for students (3) institutional support teachers receive (4) the environment in which teachers operate (5) comments about racism, race relations, and slavery (6) hopes for students surrounding race issues (7) discussions of curricular challenges in general and (8) discussions of the 1619 Project.

After defining a major category, I put all the relevant quotes from each interview into a

spreadsheet. For instance, if someone mentioned the people or organizations with which they work, I put that in the institutional support category. Some quotes were in multiple categories. I then reviewed the quotes in that category's spreadsheet and sorted them based on common sentiments which the teachers expressed. I went through this process several times, creating more cohesive subcategories with each iteration. In this process, I read each quote and noted ideas which several teachers mentioned along with those stated by only one or two teachers. I grouped sentiments together in several ways based on the sub-category label that most accurately capture the various statements made by the teachers. See Appendix 3 for detailed subcategories.[8]

After creating the categories and subcategories, I grouped teachers in nine different ways to see how their responses compared between groups. Specifically, I considered teachers teaching in the North[9] versus the South, teachers with mostly students of color, with a student body that has a white plurality,[10] and with a majority white student body. I also grouped teachers based on their urban, suburban, or rural location. In addition, I looked at how teachers' political views, racial and ethnic identities, education level, number of years teaching, gender, and age related to their responses. See Appendix 4 for the distribution of these characteristics. I did this for each of the eight major categories discussed above.

This grouping provides a systematic way of looking at the data from different vantage points. The current debates about history education are generally seen as divided along political

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[8] While I ended up doing the analysis of the interview transcripts manually and iteratively, I thought about using a software program like NVivo for the analysis. Using software would allow for more replicable analysis and could surface patterns of words a human might not find. In the end, my analysis ended up being more informal and open-ended compared to what I could have done using coding software. Both hand-coding and software allow categories and themes to emerge inductively from data. Hand-coding, though, allows the analyst to consider both the minute and broader meaning of words, phrases, and themes.

[9] Illinois is technically in the Midwestern region of the United States. When it became a state in 1818, however, it was admitted as a "free" state. Hence aspects of Illinois's history align more closely with other northern states than southern states. For the purposes of this study, I consider Illinois to be a part of the North.

[10] This means the largest racial or ethnic group is white but white students are not the majority

lines, but I wanted to ensure I did not blindly reinforce partisan divisions. Hence, I examined teachers' responses using many angles to present the complexity of teachers' situations. This analysis complements the interpretive approach I took to investigate the interview transcripts. While I am not making any major claims about the effects of these categories on teachers, they add another useful analytic for understanding the situations in which teachers find themselves.

Additionally, the teachers I interviewed are not representative of every teacher in the United States, and they likely have more in common than other teachers since they self-selected into my study. Due to my small sample size, I will never cover all potentially relevant characteristics which will affect teachers' responses to curricular challenges. Even within this sample of teachers, however, clear patterns of approaches to teaching U.S. history and responses to the debates about history education emerge.

Finally, to contextualize and supplement the interviews I conducted, I reviewed additional sources to corroborate statements from teachers and find background information on social studies education in Florida, Georgia, and Illinois. I looked at state and department of education websites for information about each state. I also reviewed news articles and tweets to find background information on the conservative challenge to the 1619 Project and teaching about racial inequality in general. Overall, by considering the perspectives of several U.S. history teachers and analyzing their responses to interview questions from multiple angles, I hope to reveal how teachers think about the work they do in their classrooms without reducing them to the stereotypes of U.S. politics.

Overview

My aim is to add to knowledge about teacher response to curricular change and educational reform implementation by studying how U.S. history teachers teach during public

contention over slavery and racial inequality. Current high school students will eventually shape the future direction of the United States. Therefore, whether they internalize current divisions or learn to have meaningful conversation with those of different backgrounds has important consequences. The remaining chapters focus on how the 20 U.S. history teachers I interviewed see their work as educators. I show that U.S. history teachers see themselves as passing on knowledge and skills to the next generation. Their professional commitments to support student learning alongside their very real time and capacity constraints shape how they approach their job, and these factors are far more important than the current politics surrounding history education. In fact, most teachers hold negative views of conservative critics since they see their concerns as mostly political and not as much about student learning. This is true, despite substantial regional and local differences in teaching environments as it relates to teachers presenting content about the history of slavery and anti-Black racism in the United States.

In chapter two, I give a brief overview of the history of debates about U.S. history education. Additionally, I provide an explanation for why people debate curricula and why these debates matter. In doing so, I show that the current contention surrounding U.S. history education is not new and follows in a long tradition of similar debates. This background illuminates how history education has changed over the course of the twentieth century along with the ways it remains similar across the twentieth and twenty-first century.

The third chapter focuses on educators' shared values and culture across the three states where they work. The U.S. history teachers I interviewed focus on preparing students to become engaged citizens who possess critical thinking skills, understand and respect others' perspectives, and know factual content about U.S. history. Teachers employ a variety of tactics to support student learning. These have a common thread of showing multiple perspectives in the

classroom. Overall, these values U.S. history teachers hold creates an identity for them which impacts how they respond to curricular challenges.

In the fourth chapter, we see the ways regional and local environments affect how close the conservative challenges are to teachers. There are environmental differences in the support teachers receive when it comes to discussing slavery and racism. Generally speaking, I find that teachers in Northern urban regions receive the most support in teaching about slavery and racism and are most shielded from conservative critics. In contrast, teachers in the South and rural areas experience curricular challenges more directly. Conservative political discourse has a chilling effect on the way teachers teach the history of slavery and centrality of white supremacy to U.S. history as teachers fear parents might complain if they dive too deeply into these topics.

The fifth chapter considers how teachers respond to the 1619 Project as an example of curricular challenges. I find that while teachers embrace change slowly, they are more likely to engage with the 1619 Project than conservative challenges. I discuss the ways teachers either ignore the concerns of conservatives and view them as illegitimate or make symbolic concessions to the challengers only to largely keep teaching in the ways they have in the past.

Finally, I conclude with a discussion of why the way U.S. history teachers encounter curricular challenges matters and what we can learn from this study. I argue that this study highlights the importance of listening to teachers' voices as their goals for students differ from those discussed in the public sphere conversation. Ultimately, I contend that U.S. history teachers collectively help to shape understandings of U.S. history, and many see their work as helping to heal present social divisions.

Chapter 2: U.S. History Curricular Struggles are a Long-Standing American Tradition

Debates about what to teach students in history classrooms are not new, and they are not limited to the United States. Curricular control is a power struggle over who gets to transmit their representation of the world to the next generation (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). From the Scopes Trial to debates about prayer in school to the banning of certain literature, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Beloved*, curricular challenge is recurrent in the United States. In the context of U.S. history education, nearly every decade or two, there have been intense national debates between those fighting for a more inclusive U.S. history curriculum and those wanting to restrict it to match their beliefs and view of America.

Curricular Struggles Related to Economics and Politics

Following the tides of political change, history curricular struggles occurred again and again throughout the twentieth century (Symcox, 2002). For example, in the 1920s, unlikely coalitions between European ethnic immigrants and American nativists emerged to restrict U.S. history curriculum; they fought against perceived slights to the American Founders and "pro-British" interpretations of the American Revolution. "New history" textbooks, influenced by trends in historical scholarship, began to emphasize social and economic factors in history and how history affects the present. They did not portray the American Revolution as a binary with colonists as heroes fighting for freedom and the British as simply tyrannical. Rather, "new history" textbooks described the complexity of thought on both sides and the role of

socioeconomic factors in the revolution. Critics feared the books diminished America's founders and therefore America. In response, they started countless debates, trials, and bans on these textbooks. At least twenty-one states considered legislation to regulate "new history" textbooks (Zimmerman 2002). By the end of the 1920s, however, this area of contention had died down, with minor changes made to textbooks and any legislation that states passed largely ignored (Dearstyne, 2022).

Moving on from disputes about the teaching of the American Revolution, history textbook debates during the Great Depression centered on the American social, economic, and political way of life. Right-wing Americans charged that textbooks were too class-based or socialist and wanted to restrict them. Led by segments of the American Legion and business community, activists equated "Americanism" with capitalism. They argued that pointing out failures in the capitalist system might undermine children's faith in the nation. This is an argument used again and again in curricular struggles during the twentieth century. Sales of one textbook series, *Man and his Changing Society* dropped by 90% from 289,000 in 1938 to 21,000 in 1944 because of this activism. During the Cold War, right-wing activists likewise tried to purge American textbooks of anything seeming to promote socialism in the United States, such as positive descriptions of public housing and progressive taxation (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 82).

Race-Related Curricular Struggles and Segregated History Education

Another longstanding thread of curricular contention concerns the representation of different groups, particularly surrounding race and ethnicity. For instance, disputes about slavery and Black history resulted in different histories being taught in the North and South and also to white students and Black students (Zimmerman, 2002). Throughout the twentieth century debates raged about how to teach the Civil War. Confederate loyalists amassed great influence

over history curriculum in thousands of white schools in the South with campaigns spearheaded by groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy. They held campaigns to:

> reject a book that speaks of the Constitution other than [as] a Compact between Sovereign States . . . that calls the Confederate soldier a traitor or rebel, and the war a rebellion . . . that says the South fought to hold her slaves . . . that speaks of the slaveholder of the South as cruel and unjust to his slaves. (Rutherford 1919, p.5 as cited in Zimmerman 2002, p.36-37)

Confederate loyalists often claimed to fight for an unbiased history. They viewed anything other than their viewpoint as biased, however, a trend which reappears throughout history debates in the twentieth century. This made it difficult for any true or lasting compromise to occur. As a result, publishers sometimes released multiple editions of books to placate different regional audiences (Zimmerman 2002).

On the other side of the challenge, in the 1920s and 1930s, Black scholars and activists argued that U.S. history textbooks did not do enough to explain the evils of slavery, champion the abolition movement, or highlight the courage of those involved in the African American freedom struggle. Additionally, when Black Americans were included in textbooks, they were often subject to gross negative stereotypes. Some Black scholars promoted separate Black history textbooks to use to teach Black students. A subset of southern schools with majority Black students adopted these textbooks for Black history courses. While white Southern children were learning white-washed versions of history from textbooks promoting the integrity of the South in slavery and the Civil War, Black students had the opportunity to take elective courses in Black history. In the 1960s, Black activists continued to push for both separate studies of Black history and better representation in textbooks (Zimmerman, 2002, Chapter 2). Following the

Civil Rights movement, public schools in the South became more integrated, more Black Americans moved to live in the North, and far larger numbers of Black Americans were able to vote. Together, these factors created pressure on schools to adopt more integrated textbooks which included more accurate portrayals of Black Americans (Zimmerman 2002).

A more recent example of history education controversy, and one connected directly to current debates, relates to the attempt to create National History Standards in the mid-1990s. These new multi-cultural and multi-ethnic standards had been proposed by representatives of teachers, historians, parents, social studies specialists, and public interest groups in 1992. After 32 months of discussion and collaboration, Lynne Cheney, co-founder of the standards project and future second-lady of the United States, wrote an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal, entitled *The End of History*, harshly criticizing the standards. This set off a year and a half long national debate about American history and how it should be taught to students. Critics of the National History Standards often described it as “left-wing, nihilistic, divisive, and ‘politically correct’” (Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn 2000, p. 102). Ultimately, the Senate censured the standards and the momentum for them died down (Symcox, 2002). The standards were never implemented on a national level, but many state education departments consulted them as they created their own state history standards.

Given this long history of curricular debates, it is unsurprising, and even predictable, that the United States is once again debating whose history and what values should be taught to American children and that segregated history education still exists. A 2020 study looking at Black history in state social studies standards discovered vast state-level differences in what students are expected to learn and know today. This study focused more on regional differences than racial differences. Nevertheless, the study reported that some states mention slavery many

more times in their state standards than others. For instance, starting in third grade, Massachusetts students are expected to be aware that there were both free and enslaved Africans in their state. Other states include inaccurate depictions of slavery, such as North Carolina mentioning the “immigration of Africans to the American South.” Most list slavery as the main cause of the Civil War. Sixteen state history standards, however, still name states’ rights as an important contributing factor, a term southerners used to after the Civil War ended to hide that they were fighting to preserve slavery. This is the case despite historians discarding states’ rights as a cause of the Civil War (Duncan et al., 2020).

A *New York Times* analysis of U.S. history textbooks in California and Texas in 2020 also found differences in the content of the books in ways that mirror the nation’s divisions (Goldstein, 2020). For instance, one history textbook produced for California discusses how discriminatory policies prevented Black Americans from moving to the suburbs in the 1950s. In contrast, the textbook published by the same company for Texas does not include that information. These recent studies follow in the tradition of research finding differences in history curricula across regions in the United States (Nash, 2009; Zimmerman, 2002).

Additionally, the 1619 Project is an example of current debates. It became so controversial because it both intervenes in America’s founding narrative and puts Black people at the center of U.S. history. It challenges the overarching narrative of the United States’ progressing toward equality for all by focusing on the continuance of white supremacy. Published through a newspaper as prominent as the *New York Times*, the 1619 Project garnered greater national attention and controversy than Black history textbooks used in the South in the early twentieth century. While the arguments made in the project are not new, they arrived on

America's main stage in a new way in 2019, again sparking curricular challenges over what to teach America's children.

Why These U.S. History Curricular Debates Matter

Despite these many arguments about U.S. history surrounding race and ethnicity, many education practitioners and researchers have come to see multi-racial and multi-ethnic history as important for all students to learn. This means the outcomes of these debates have real consequences on student learning and development. Banks (2003) argues that teaching the history of all ethnic groups helps students gain the necessary knowledge and perspective to effectively participate in our multicultural society. This is especially important as the United States becomes more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. If students fail to learn the role of all racial and ethnic groups in America, they will be less prepared to converse and work with those who have different backgrounds from them. Majority white students are likely to learn a sense of group superiority if theirs is the only history that is told or the only story that is told in positive way. Without common frames of reference which arise from a shared understanding of their nation's history, collective action and the development of national unity become difficult. This can lead to some of the intense divisions we see in the United States today.

The inclusion or non-inclusion of multiethnic history, and the way it is taught, impacts students' self-development too. Culturally responsive teaching practices help students of all races develop positive racial-ethnic identities. In particular, Byrd (2016) finds that balancing teaching respect for individuals of different backgrounds with the teaching of historical and contemporary racism is most effective in developing students' identities. This can help buffer students against experiences of discrimination and make them aware of their own biases (Byrd, 2016).

Students of color benefit from a more accurate inclusion of their racial and ethnic group's history and discussions of racism in U.S. history curriculum. Students tend to do better in school when the history and accomplishments of their ethnic group are told in the classroom (Epstein, 2008; Gay, 2010). This finding is especially important because white students have significantly higher quality educational outcomes on average than students of color (Dee, 2005; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). The inclusion of multi-ethnic and multi-racial history has the potential to increase academic performance for students of color. Yet, as evidenced in the review above, throughout U.S. history, teachers were, and in some places of the country still are, more prone to center the history of white Americans. Although strides have slowly been made toward more multi-cultural and inclusive curriculum, the history of Black Americans, a large part of which is also the history of white supremacy, is still often subject to contention and debate, making it less likely to be adequately included in the traditional U.S. history curriculum. These benefits of multi-ethnic and multi-racial history are again at stake due to current debates surrounding the 1619 Project, critical race theory,[11] and inequality and privilege in social studies classes.

Due to the many people pulling education in different directions, it is essential to gather the voices of teachers, who are on the ground working with students, to see how they respond to these current debates. My study does this by talking with public high school U.S. history teachers and describing what I learned from them. Namely, through interviewing these teachers, I found they have a professional identity, discussed in the next chapter, which informs their teaching practice and provides a justification to resist some of this criticism from education outsiders.

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[11] Critical race theory is an academic and legal framework which emphasizes the systemic role of racism in American society ("Critical Race Theory FAQ," 2022). It has become politicized in the past couple years, is used as a catch-all phrase to include all diversity efforts, and is charged with making American intolerant (Butcher, 2020).

Chapter 3: The Values and Teaching Methods of U.S. History Teachers

Gina has taught in some fashion for almost thirty years. She did a little bit of "online teaching before it was cool" and most recently has worked for a public high school in a suburb of Chicago for over a decade. Despite being an experienced teacher and a well-trained educator (having both a bachelor's and a master's degree related to education), Gina has found herself with unique difficulties over the previous few years. She believes strongly in not bringing her personal views into the classroom, but that has become increasingly challenging. When discussing how she talks about current events with her students, Gina states:

> You need to recognize that you can't put your perspective on it, your spin . . . I struggled to talk positively about President Trump's presidency. Therefore, I found myself not talking about it very much because I was afraid of how I could talk about it in a way that wasn't going to put my biases on it.

Gina's statement illustrates an important characteristic of teachers. They are people with beliefs, biases, and backgrounds that influence how they teach. As history educators discuss topics that connect to their personal experiences and are politically charged, they must decide how much of themselves to bring into the classroom. Do they, as one educator puts it, "never tell them what I think or how I vote or whatever because that's just inappropriate"? Or do they use their personal backgrounds to connect with students and encourage them to engage with historical material?

The history teachers who participated in my study articulate a shared value of showing multiple perspectives in their classrooms and avoiding pushing their personal beliefs on students. Out of the twenty teachers interviewed, all but three mentioned keeping their personal beliefs to

themselves. The way teachers describe this commitment manifesting varies from teacher to teacher. The main point, however, is that in all the cases teachers want to enhance student learning. Against expectations associated with conservative activism surrounding U.S. history, the knowledge and skills that the teachers hope students acquire are the main focus of their time and are central to a teacher identity that cuts across other differences between teachers in environment, personal characteristics, and beliefs.

In the rest of this chapter, I show how U.S. history teachers' main goal is to help students learn knowledge of the nation's past and to become critical-thinkers and empathetic citizens. I describe four methods teachers reported using to achieve their goals for student learning. Teachers adhere to their hopes for students and the methods to achieve their goals within the context of a public school. It is important to note that the values I describe are not the only values teachers hold. Nor are the methods the only ones that teachers articulate using. Overall, teachers' goals for their students make up a history teacher identity which rises above the conservative curricular challenges.

Teaching Method: Withholding Personal Beliefs from Students

Some teachers describe trying to never share their personal beliefs and perspectives with students, which they state is a method to enhance learning. Thomas, for example, teaches U.S. history in rural Florida. He finds himself in a classroom full of mostly white students who "have already firmly held political beliefs but don't know why they have those firmly held political beliefs." Thomas told me:

> I don't want my students to know where I stand politically because I want to be able to challenge them, no matter what they believe . . . there should be an element where that doesn't matter, but there's also a concern that I've now lost credibility. I don't want that to

> be the case, so I've tried to make it a heuristic in my class that no matter what your belief is I'm going to try to challenge you on it and give you the opposite viewpoints.

If Thomas shares his political beliefs with his students and a student disagrees with them, they might be less likely to listen to his teaching or consider other perspectives which Thomas poses. This would then be a detriment to their learning. By challenging students' perspectives, no matter what they believe, Thomas tries to get students to be open-minded, to learn to think critically, and to evaluate their own beliefs.

Thomas's decision to withhold his political stances from students comes out of a public-school environment that encourages teachers to be careful about sharing their politics. Some schools around the country have policies about presenting balanced perspectives on political or controversial subjects. Teachers can and have been placed on leave for encouraging students to embrace the same beliefs as them (Thayer, 2016). In addition, teachers have lost court battles after wearing political buttons to school or encouraging their students to adopt their political beliefs (Wohl, 2005). Recent legislation banning the teaching of critical race theory and the 1619 Project in Florida, also states, "efficient and faithful teaching further means that . . . teachers serve as facilitators for student discussion and do not share their personal views or attempt to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view" (Required Instruction Planning, 2021). Since teachers have authority over students and could be perceived as representing their schools while teaching, every teacher I interviewed emphasized that they see themselves as not pushing their beliefs on students. Not every teacher, however, never shares their personal views with students as this guidance suggests and I discuss shortly. In addition, there is a difference between sharing one's personal beliefs and attempting to indoctrinate students in those beliefs.

Another teacher, Paul, despite teaching in a very different environment and having a very

different background from Thomas, expressed similar sentiments. Paul grew up on the South Side of Chicago. After entering several successful business ventures, he decided to go back to school for education. Now, he teaches history to students with special education needs in the community where he grew up. The school where he teaches is highly segregated, a common feature of many Chicago schools, with a mostly Black student body. When asked if current events impact his teaching, Paul states:

> I'm not one of those teachers that puts my own emotions into teaching. I believe that students need to be able to guide their own opinion, no matter what's going on in the world. When I'm teaching history or current events, I feel like if we put our own opinion into it, then instead of students developing critical thinking skills, they're developing, "Oh well, [Mr. Paul] feels this way, so I feel that way too." The whole point of learning is not to be a puppet; it's to have your own developmental skills as well as identity.

Both Paul and Thomas want to help their students learn and grow as thinkers. While Thomas is concerned about losing credibility if students learn his opinions, Paul is concerned his students will parrot his personal beliefs back to him. In both cases this is a detriment to students learning how to think on their own and develop their own critical viewpoints.[12]

Citizenship Goal: Critical Thinking

Paul and Thomas's reasoning about keeping their opinions to themselves in the classroom reveals one of the most common goals the history teachers I interviewed discussed for their students: developing critical thinking. Many teachers see themselves as preparing students to be active and engaged citizens of the United States. This can take the form of recognizing the

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[12] The neutrality that Paul and Thomas discuss stems from a longer standing tradition in education of procedural neutrality. This is the idea that teachers should not make their views known on issues which are controversial as it could make it harder for students to develop their own divergent opinions (Singh, 1989).

importance of voting and getting involved in their communities. An additional important element of citizenship that teachers emphasize is being able to engage with people and sources in an analytical way.

Paul discusses this goal succinctly and emphatically. When asked what the most important thing that he wants students to get out of his history classes, he responds, “to be that investigator because that's what's lacking in today's society. We don't have enough investigating. You just have enough believers. Everyone wants to believe everyone else, instead of just taking the time to do their own research.” He brings up critical thinking and citizenship goals again when asked if he has concerns about teaching the 1619 Project:

> I don't see it ever giving me a hard time because I'm not a biased teacher. I give my all to make sure my students gain their own opinions because I don't need parrots. I need free thinkers so that America can run the right way. If we just have parrots, parrots decide to parrot whatever the teacher is saying and then no one really gets any discourse and no one has any civil conversations and no one goes anywhere from there. It's no benefit.

He wants students to practice civil discourse in his classroom so they can continue to do so after they graduate. This is especially important given the current climate of people listening to others and believing them without fact-checking what they are saying. Overall, Paul describes working to remove his biases from the classroom to help students to develop their own belief system.

In one of Paul’s classes, he witnessed students engaging in the type of civil conversation he thinks is so important. He proudly described to me:

> I did have that situation happen in my classrooms about the 13th Amendment. I had a kid scream out, “Kanye West says we still slaves now.” One of the girls responded with her own educated opinion. I didn't give it to her, didn’t tell her, didn’t feed her nothing. She

> said, "you can look at it that way or you can look at it that we put ourselves into situations to where we become this way. The white man could put his foot on their throat" – and this is how she said it – "and stop us from breathing, but we can choose to lay there and not fight or we could choose to fight and change our stars." I hear her and I let her express herself. Now, I never influenced it or put my own opinion into there, and I just asked the young man, "well, how do you feel about what she just said?"

This interaction illustrates the goals Paul and Thomas describe. They articulate allowing their students to have conversations and disagreements with each other in a respectful manner without interfering by putting their own perspectives into the conversation. In this way, teachers see themselves as acting as facilitators of learning and, as one teacher described it to me, are "teachers not preachers."

Teaching Method: Sharing Personal Backgrounds to Connect with Students

While both Thomas and Paul describe not sharing their personal beliefs with students, other teachers told me they actively share aspects of their personal backgrounds to connect with students and draw them in. For instance, Mary, who is from the South, describes growing up in similar environments to her students. She sees this as allowing her to connect with them and understand the culture they are coming from as they study U.S. history.

Additionally, one teacher, Jason, uses his immigrant background to relate to his students. Jason has been teaching for 25 years in Florida – twenty years at a middle school and the past five at a high school. He self identifies as Asian or mixed race because his mother is Japanese, and his father is white. He states:

> But I do try to bring myself like when we talk about immigration. My mother is from Japan; she's not from America. She doesn't even speak English. And I tell kids that I'm

> technically first generation. I served as the interpreter for my mother. She's deaf, so I know how to sign a little. The sign isn't official sign; it's what we learned as a kid, but I interpreted from my mother and that really relates to a lot of my kids who are Hispanic because they had to do the same thing for their mom and dad. Stuff like that, I try to bring my own personal history, and that really does relate for the kids.

For immigrant students, to have a teacher who has had a similar experience as them can be important. Jason tries to discuss his background so his students know that they can trust him and learn from him. At the same time, however, Jason stated right before the last comment, "I really do try to keep my political beliefs [to myself], I don't think most kids can tell, politically, what I am because I really do try really hard not to sway them in any direction. That's not my job." Jason uses similar language to Paul and Thomas to affirm the value of political neutrality even though he also uses his personal background to connect with students.

Daniel has similar understandings as Jason about sharing some aspects of himself while keeping other aspects private. He describes his personal background:

> I grew up in a very rough environment. As I got myself out, I decided I wanted to help people not fall in the same pitfalls I did. That started as being a caseworker for juveniles on parole. And then that went into being a counselor. And ultimately, that translated into being a teacher.

Now, Daniel works as a special education teacher at a high school in Chicago that is 99 percent Hispanic. He currently specializes in teaching history to students with special education needs.

Since Daniel has had similar experiences as his students and is of a similar ethnic background to them, he tries to make history relevant for them:

> I am a Hispanic man. I can kind of say, "okay, this has been our struggles with the

> whites. This has been our struggles with African Americans. This has been our struggles with this history. This is what we got to look at." I'm in a better position to make it more relevant in the sense that I know where their hang-ups are – what they're not going to get, what they're not understanding, what they're just not connecting with.

Because Daniel has a similar ethnic background to his students, he perceives himself as relating to them more closely and understanding their perspectives. When he says, "this has been our struggles," he wants his students to realize that the history that they are learning relates personally to where they are today. His comments echo a common argument made by race matching scholars that, students benefit when they have teachers who come from similar backgrounds as them (e.g., Dee, 2005; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Joshi et al., 2018). So, Daniel digs into this connection to help students be engaged.

While Daniel reports that he uses his ethnicity to connect with students and support their learning, he still tries to remove his personal political beliefs from his classroom in a similar manner to Jason. Daniel did not even want to share his political beliefs with me. He states:

> I don't ever want to teach them what to think. Just like I don't tell you what my political leanings is, I don't tell them. Because I want them to feel free to share whatever feelings they have. . . . I want them to understand the reality, the facts, but understand that different groups are going to see things differently. And that we have to take into consideration everyone's views, but also not ignore our own.

Like Paul, Thomas, and Jason, Daniel says he takes his own personal political beliefs out of the classroom to help students learn "the facts." There is a distinction for Daniel between sharing his political beliefs and sharing his ethnicity. He believes his Hispanic ethnicity can be a point of connection with his students and enhance their learning. But, he thinks his political beliefs might

hinder his student's learning processes. Those he keeps to himself.

Citizenship Goal: Respect for Different Opinions

The last part of Daniel's comment – "we have to take into consideration everyone's views" – alludes to another citizenship learning goal several teachers discussed: developing understanding and respect for the opinions and perspectives of others, even if they disagree with them. Different teachers with varying backgrounds discussed this goal and how it relates to critical thinking, civil discourse, and developing one's own opinions. Gina from suburban Chicago states, "There are lots of perspectives and all. You don't have to agree with all of them, but you have to be aware that they're out there. How one person experiences history is going to be very different from another person." Another teacher from Georgia, Lisa, states:

> In order for us to be able to interact and communicate with each other in an effective way, we need to understand where everybody else is coming from. We also have to understand that my American history can be different from your American history and it's different from the person sitting next to you that are in my classes. We're all coming from very different places. I think it teaches us tolerance – or I don't even like the word tolerance, because that to me just means if you're tolerating something that's like you're barely putting up with it – but in order for us to accept each other, we have to learn it.

From these comments, we see how teachers strive to help students recognize others' differences in a respectful manner. Teachers such as Daniel see removing personal beliefs from the classroom as a way to create a safe place for students to explore their and their classmates' perspectives. Through open dialogue, students will be more willing to share their viewpoints and not be hindered if they think their teacher disagrees with their opinion.

Teachers see respect for differing opinions as being especially important right now,

which influences their teaching methods. Tyler who teachers in Illinois articulates this view:

> The increasing political divisions and adversarial tone taken when speaking about other fellow Americans from the extremes of both sides has resulted in my stressing that we all have a common bond regardless of political belief and the key to understanding one another is dialogue not dismissal.

Teachers in part describe demonstrating this by making space for their students' varying perspectives. When public figures cannot demonstrate how to communicate with respect, at least some teachers believe it is their job to help students learn these essential skills. In the context of current debates about history curricula, this citizenship goal makes teachers more likely to favor curriculum which incorporates multiple perspectives and promotes free thinking and open conversation. In contrast, they will be less likely to include curriculum which limits these skills and abilities.

Teaching Method: Allowing Beliefs to Influence Teaching Materials

Of the teachers who believe in not sharing their personal beliefs with their students, a subset of them made sure to mention that their beliefs have at least some impact on the curriculum they choose to present and how they present it. Even if they do not explicitly share their beliefs with students, they are cognizant of the ways their beliefs shape their selection of teaching materials. Gina, whom we saw at the very beginning of this chapter, articulates:

> I think, absolutely, what we as educators choose to talk about is influenced by our personal biases. What we include, what we exclude is always going to be based on some of our biases and maybe it's just based on personal interest or knowledge or whatever, and sometimes it's on our beliefs. We have a curriculum that establishes what is essential that we have to address, but outside of that its very much people's biases are going to

> influence that for sure. What I try to tell my students is, "I'm going to try to approach this from multiple perspectives, but you need to also call me out on it. Part of this is a discussion. I'm a human being, and human beings have bias."

While teachers do their best to help students learn and are cautious about sharing their own perspectives, teachers are never going to present exactly the same information.

Gina also emphasizes that state and district standards guide, but do not entirely determine, what teachers address in their classrooms. In Florida and Georgia, but not Illinois, there are state tests in U.S. history that assess students' knowledge and whether teachers covered the content in the state U.S. history standards (*State Education Practices*, 2018). There is often flexibility, though, in how teachers discuss the content in the standards, and they can bring in supplemental material. Teachers retain a large degree of autonomy in their classrooms (Tyack & Cuban, 2009, p. 9) which allows them to maintain an individualized style. As Gina states, whether it is based on interest, knowledge, or beliefs, each teacher will cover different materials. Several teachers that I interviewed discussed using materials that they had found through personal reading, such as the history of okra in the South, narratives of the Great Migration, and even the 1619 Project. As we think about teachers' beliefs and interests impacting their choice of instruction materials, it is probable that more personal preference shows up in classrooms than teachers might like to admit.

Christopher, a young teacher in rural Illinois, shares a similar sentiment to Gina. He shows the autonomy teachers have while also valuing an accurate portrayal of history. Christopher states:

> Everyone has biases including teachers, and if you don't recognize that you're affected somewhat by your bias, I just don't see how you can be doing your job right as a history

> teacher. You got to know that you're biased. My department chair says, we teach history; we teach what happened in the past. We have to pick and choose what stories we're going to tell. There's not enough time to teach the whole of American history, but we don't make stuff up. The history of what happened in people's lives in this country isn't determined by me being a liberal.

Christopher's statement recognizes the autonomy of teachers in their classrooms along with the inability of people to ever be truly unbiased. As much as teachers might state that they are not biased teachers, we all have biased perceptions based on our social identities and experiences (Gershenson et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2015). The fact that so many of the teachers I interviewed still try to be neutral or unbiased, however, shows how deeply held that value is among education professionals. Even though Christopher acknowledges that he has some say over the content he teaches in his class, he makes sure to underline that he is still teaching factual history.

Content Goal: Factual History

Factual history is the bedrock of other important values of objectivity and independence of thought. My interview with Dustin, who teaches in Florida, provides one of the clearest depictions of how he, and likely other U.S. history teachers, determine what is a fact. When I asked Dustin what the most important thing is that he wants his students to get out of his history class, he responds, "the truth." I asked him what the truth means, and he told me the truth is "historical facts that are supported by cited and sourced material from primary source documents accompanied by secondary sources that provide multiple lenses to view the content." Dustin's comment points to the idea of objectivity as it relates to how facts are produced through a scientific process of historical research.

As previously mentioned, teachers value showing multiple perspectives in the classroom.

Daniel states, “history is about different perspectives,” and “history is a study of facts and the interpretation of those facts.” As such, some teachers are also aware that the facts traditionally included in history classes are not completely neutral. Several teachers in different states discussed the Eurocentric or whitewashed version of U.S. history which has been presented to students in the past in history classes and how they try to counter that by showing different perspectives. This reveals an acknowledgement of some sort of agenda setting in the field of history education which values certain facts and perspectives over others.

Additionally, teachers want themselves and students to decide on their interpretation of history free from the influence of others. This sense of independence is important and relates to the critical thinking goals teachers have for students. Overall, most of the teachers I interviewed have complex views on what the study of history is and what it means. They believe history should be approached from different perspectives, acknowledge that some facts are emphasized more than others in historical narratives, and allow their students to draw their own conclusions about the nation’s past. This emphasis on factual history coming from multiple perspectives reveals how teachers might respond to curricular challenges. Namely, they are likely to reject arguments about history that do not align with these professional historical standards.

Teaching Method: Sharing Personal Beliefs to Engage Students

While many teachers I interviewed describe withholding their personal political beliefs from students, not every teacher leaves their opinions at the school door. Some teachers report sharing their views with students if students inquire directly. For instance, one teacher stated, “Now if a kid asked me specifically what my personal views are, sometimes I openly respond.” Other teachers say they directly share their beliefs without being asked. This last type of teacher is in the minority. Yet, they still follow the same principles of trying to use their backgrounds

and beliefs to enhance student learning.

Kelly states she uses her personal beliefs to engage students in the classroom. She has been teaching for over 20 years, with about half of her time at her current school in a small Florida town. Like other teachers, she studied social studies education and has a master's degree. Kelly has more conservative political and Christian beliefs. When I asked her if her personal identities and beliefs impact her teaching, she responded, "100%. I am a Southern Baptist, white female, so yes ma'am." She went on to describe how she got pushback from one parent for talking about Moses in her world history class. She responded to the parent that he was a real historical figure. She then told me about a recent scenario from her classroom:

> The other day, we were having a debate on abortion, and I kept joking around with my kids. They would say stuff, and I would say, "abortion, oh you mean murder." The kids knew I was joking, and I was doing it to play the devil's advocate and get them riled up. And the more riled up they get, the more they want to research and to prove me wrong.

While Kelly brings her personal beliefs into the classroom about something that is very political at the current moment, she sees herself doing it in a way to push students to do research and understand their own beliefs better. From her point of view, she does not force her opinion on her students but makes sure they know another perspective.

Since Kelly teaches students in a public school who are required to take her class, they are likely not all intrinsically motivated to study U.S. history. Kelly shares that she employs her political beliefs as a tactic to support and stimulate student learning, not as a method of indoctrination or persuasion. Kelly's phrasing of playing "the devil's advocate" mirrors a comment Thomas made. Thomas describes, "I've tried to make it a heuristic in my class that no matter what your belief is I'm going to try to challenge you on it and give you the opposite

viewpoints." While Thomas withholds his personal opinions from the classroom, he and Kelly used the same tactic to encourage students to examine their beliefs. However much teachers choose to share of themselves with their students, ultimately, every teacher I interviewed explained that what they are trying to do in their job is to teach children necessary critical thinking skills, respect for others, and knowledge about U.S. history.

Content Goal: A Comprehensive Overview of U.S. History

In addition to teachers holding citizenship goals for their students and valuing factual history, the history teachers I interviewed want students to develop more accurate and complete conceptions of U.S. history. For many people, their high school U.S. history course will be the most comprehensive overview of U.S. history they ever receive. Teachers want their students to come away with different types of historical understandings, such as learning from past historical mistakes and discovering how our current moment developed out of past events. For instance, Daniel, who is from Chicago and connects with students through his Hispanic background, explains:

> My personal view is that they have to have an understanding of how we got to the issues that we face today. And that can only come from an understanding of what things happened. And it's very difficult to be fully engaged with the issues that are going on today if you don't understand anything that happened in the past.

Daniel echoes statements made by other teachers when he articulates the importance of history classes in developing historical context. Many teachers see teaching a comprehensive overview of U.S. history – the good, the bad, and the ugly – as essential to developing thoughtful and engaged citizens.

Of the teachers I interviewed, over half place more emphasis on the skills developed

through studying history than the content itself. For instance, when I asked Christopher what is the most important thing he wants students to come away with from his U.S. history class, he responded, “while the content’s important, it’s really the skills that they learn in history – how to recognize cause and effect and how to disagree civilly with other people.” I asked him why he thought that, and he told me he thinks the content is available for students to find if they are curious about it. And if they are not curious about it, they will not remember what he teaches them. By giving them the skills to evaluate sources critically and to communicate with others civilly, however, they will be able to access historical content if they become interested.

In the final analysis, both historical content and historical skills connect to the citizenship goals history teachers have for their students. The teachers I interviewed discuss how historical content and skills are also connected to students’ academic, social, and civic development. In this, they reflect widely shared values and goals, not only among history teachers, but also in education more generally (Jacobsen & Rothstein, 2006). Overall, these goals for student learning that teachers hold constitute part of a teacher identity. I show later that teachers describe using these goals as a means to help justify their response to criticism, fitting in with professional identity literature that shows those in a profession have a shared culture which guide their work (Lamont, 2009).

Teacher Values and Curricular Challenges

The citizenship and content goals are at the heart of what U.S. history teachers see themselves doing. There are variations in terms of how much teachers subscribe to these values, but they matter. Additionally, three quarters of the teachers I interviewed attended some type of education program for their undergraduate or graduate degrees. This is roughly in line with the 63 percent of high school social studies teachers in the United States who have degrees in

education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In these programs, and in subsequent education conferences, professional development, and conversation with their colleagues, teachers develop a shared culture. A major finding from my study is that this shared culture creates a history teacher identity which transcends regional and local differences between teachers. New institutional theory and professional identity literature might lead us to expect this finding that the expectations and culture of the educational sector at large influence educators' values and decision-making (Binder, 2002, p. 22; Lamont, 2009).

As conservative critics have increasingly called into question the practices and materials of history teachers, it is important to understand the mindset that most teachers will bring to these challenges. In the rest of this thesis, I will show how viewing educators as members of a shared culture explains their responses to challenges to U.S. history curriculum. Teachers are unlikely to abandon their deeply held beliefs without a good reason and buying into the way the challenge is framed (Binder, 2002). When the 1619 Project was published in 2019, some teachers were primed to use it as a supplemental material to enhance conversation, critical thinking, and the understanding of different viewpoints. The 1619 Project aims to promote conversation about the origin of the United States, and this is likely to resonate with teachers whose learning goals include critical thinking and understanding varying perspectives. In contrast, as I show in chapter five, even teachers who do not use the 1619 Project are likely to shy away from the conservative critics seeking to limit it or limit the teaching of factual history related to slavery and racism in the United States.

As conservative challengers start to call out teachers for what they term the "neo-Marxist propaganda" that is the 1619 Project (Cotton, 2020a) and describe how "students and even teachers are under constant threat by Critical Race Theory advocates who are attempting to

manipulate classroom content," (Staff of Governor DeSantis, 2021) my research suggests that those teaching history on the ground, like the teachers I interviewed, will have a hard time taking them seriously. This is especially the case since many teachers are not closely following these debates and never have or will use the 1619 Project or critical race theory in their classrooms. Additionally, the teachers I interviewed all report that they are trying to do the exact opposite of indoctrinating children by helping them learn to analyze sources and put events into context, so they can make informed decisions. In fact, teachers from all parts of the political spectrum told me exactly that. One teacher from the South who identifies as a libertarian states:

> I'm not in the business [of] propagandizing students. The truth and facts speak for themselves, and students can come to their own conclusions. . . . It's not for me to tell them what to think, but if you provide the historical facts presented with evidence, the students can come to their own conclusions on the content.

Many teachers are doing their best in a very polarized time to prepare their students to be the next generation of citizens. They allow students to engage with a variety of materials to come to their own opinions. This, however, can be more challenging amid the current contention surrounding history education. One teacher from Georgia who identifies as a moderate progressive finds the debates old and draining:

> I'm tired. I'm tired of people making the teaching of our history a political fight and using teachers as scapegoats or pegging us as villains trying to indoctrinate the delicate, impressionable young minds of our nation. I have found that, generally speaking, students *want* to talk about the hard issues and difficult topics. And they are mature enough to handle the messy history. If there is a problem, it is usually with the parents. But I believe the more we teach history correctly, and not shy away from the difficult and controversial

topics, the better prepared our future adults will be to face the challenges of our country. As teachers try to do their jobs, some simply ignore the debates. Others are not able to, however, and have a choice to make about how much to bend to the conservative critics and how much to stand their ground.

We see in the next chapter the way regional and local situations affect how teachers approach the history of race relations and slavery and how much they need to deal with these outside challenges to their classes. Many teachers reject the claims of conservative critics. That does not mean, however, that they are completely immune to the rhetoric surrounding how they should do their job. The current chapter considers what teachers have in common and how those values inherently contradict the challenges they face. The next chapter focuses on the ways regional and local differences in the teachers' locations affect how they teach and their relation to conservative challenges to U.S. history.

Chapter 4: Regional and Local Factors which Influence History Teachers

On June 10, 2021, the Florida State Board of Education voted unanimously against instruction in Florida schools which they perceive to challenge traditional American values. Among other topics, they banned "the teaching of Critical Race Theory, meaning the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice, but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems in order to uphold the supremacy of white persons." They also state, "Instruction may not utilize material from the 1619 Project and may not define American history as something other than the creation of a new nation based largely on universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence" (Required Instruction Planning, 2021, sec. 3b).

Similarly, the previous month, the governor of Georgia sent a letter to the Georgia Board of Education encouraging its members to take steps against the teaching of critical race theory. Then, exactly one week before the Florida rule, the Georgia Board passed a resolution warning against teaching about systemic racism and mandating teaching a diversity of perspectives on current events. While Georgia's resolution is less direct than Florida's, it also states that the members of the board of education believe educators should not use instructional materials or practices "that serve to inculcate in students the following concepts . . . that the advent of slavery in the territory that is now the United States constituted the true founding of the United States" (*A Resolution of the State*, 2021, sec. 6). Along with other concepts related to critical race theory, the State Board of Education essentially is against the teaching of the 1619 Project.

In sharp contrast to Florida and Georgia, earlier in 2021, the Illinois General Assembly called for increased education on minority racial and ethnic groups in the United States through a

bill requiring the study of Asian Americans (*SB0648*, 2021). Prior to this legislation, the Illinois Department of Education released a 2020 report on social studies education across the state. The report laments: “The assumption of equity of power, rights, and voice” across groups, which is seen in social studies classrooms in Illinois and “can prevent the exploration of the inequities of power, rights, and voice in the present and throughout history based on sociodemographic characteristics” (Illinois Social Science Standards Review, 2020). The entire report discusses a need for social studies educators to include more “non-dominant cultural narratives” in their classrooms. How well educators will put these recommendations and legislation into practice is still to be seen. The report is evidence, however, that the state aims to acknowledge inequality with their social studies curriculum and values the incorporation of more diverse narratives – which is the exact opposite of what the Florida and Georgia Boards of Education seem to desire.

These state-level contexts profoundly affect the teachers interviewed for this study. The teachers I interviewed in the North and South share similar values, teaching objectives, and the view that history is based on facts. Teacher location, however, informs how current debates about history education challenge their individual teaching experiences. As previously outlined, there is a long history of regional and local differences in the U.S. history education students receive. In the first half of the twentieth century, schools in the North and South often taught competing narratives about the Civil War. And some classrooms across the nation with mostly or entirely Black students discussed Black history and literature while white students learned from overtly racist textbooks (Zimmerman, 2002). To see the legacy these historical and cultural differences left, this chapter compares how teachers in Illinois and teachers in Florida and Georgia see themselves as teaching the history of slavery and racism.

In this chapter, I discuss my finding of more contention about the role of slavery and

racism – past and present – in Georgia and Florida compared to in Illinois. This means that teachers in the South describe facing more concrete curricular challenges than their northern counterparts. Moreover, local factors also influence how teachers see their teaching goals and the way curricular challenges impact their classrooms. Overall, I show that teachers in Northern urban regions articulate receiving the most support in teaching about slavery and racism from state government, district administrators, and community members. Compared to teachers in the South or rural regions, northern, urban teachers feel relatively shielded from conservative critics.

Uniformity in Views on Race Relations in Illinois

The drive for an inclusive social studies curriculum in Illinois seems to have influenced Gina and her colleagues in the suburbs of Chicago. Gina describes the work of the history teachers in her district which aligns with the goals the Illinois General Assembly and Department of Education outline:

> So, we are really proud of our history curriculum. . . . every unit we actually have this document where kids spend a day or two days looking at what were African Americans doing at this time period, what were women, what were LGBTQ populations doing at this time period. At this point, we're doing a better job of making sure every unit we're bringing in these multiple perspectives, but that's pretty new. That's new.

When I asked where her curriculum comes from, Gina responded, “So, it's kind of dialing it down to what they [history teachers in her district] think is essential, always keeping in mind what the state standards and the local standards are.” Gina also mentions, “at our school we were encouraged to address January 6 with our students. We've been encouraged to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement and when it turned to riots.” At the state, district, and school level, Gina finds support in discussing past and present race-related topics.

This holds true for most teachers from Illinois that I interviewed. None of them discussed the institutions for which they work dissuading them from covering slavery or racial inequality. To be sure, not every teacher receives the same encouragement as Gina, but they at least articulate being free to do so if they want. The teachers I interviewed from Chicago were particularly likely to receive backing from their school district to teach about race-related issues. The Chicago Public Schools have done a lot of work to create relevant curriculum for their Black and Hispanic student body. I discuss the details of this more when I examine the use of the 1619 Project in chapter five. The point here is that Chicago Public School teachers are not entirely unique compared to their suburban and rural counterparts in Illinois. As Fullan (2001) articulates, departments of education, government agencies, school district personnel and principals have an important role to play in the implementation of education practices. This is why it is significant that these teachers from Illinois find support to teach race-related issues.

In addition to finding similar institutional support, teachers from Illinois describe historical slavery and racism in the context of present-day racial inequalities. Caleb's discussions of racism and slavery most clearly illustrate this point. Caleb is in his second year teaching in Illinois at a mostly white high school. He begins his U.S. history class right before the Civil War. Then, he says, "We connect slavery, as we move now forward after the Civil War, with racism as a similar thing and how that really still affects our country from way back when to now." Despite teaching in a majority white school and in an area that leans Republican politically, Caleb describes actively encouraging his students to see the effects of historical racism on the United States today. Daniel, a teacher from Chicago who we saw last chapter using his Hispanic identity to connect with students, also describes how he teaches about race relations:

Racial justice has not been accomplished in this country. . . . If you look at any

> marginalized population, there is still a long way to go. And a lot of that has parallels with what is honestly America's darkest mark, which was slavery.

Both Daniel and Caleb, who teach in vastly different environments within the same state, want their students to see that these injustices are not limited to the past. Despite having local and personal differences, they both frame classroom discussions of racism and slavery in similar manners.

Divided Views on Race Relations in Florida and Georgia

In Florida and Georgia, discussions of race relations are much more openly contentious than in the North, and teachers from the South have more varied discussions of race relations. On one level, most teachers in Florida and Georgia also make sure to emphasize that racial justice is not accomplished. For instance, Megan, who teaches at her alma mater in rural Florida, states, “So, I approach racism as something that definitely has happened in our past and, unfortunately, something that continues today and try to instill some kind of hope that my students could be the change.” Megan’s statement sounds extremely similar to those made by Caleb and Daniel in Illinois as it connects past racism with the present. She is among the southern teachers that actively work towards improving students’ understandings about race relations and the impact of slavery in the United States today.

Tracy also explains how racism still affects us today in a similar way to some teachers from Illinois. Tracy is a self-described white, Southern Baptist who teaches in rural Georgia and avers that she “used to be way more conservative than I am now.” She reports that she and her husband have debates about whether she currently teaches critical race theory in her classroom with her thinking she does and her husband thinking she does not. Tracy articulates:

> When you talk about critical race theory, you talk about that racism is embedded into the

> bedrock of what America is. It is; it was founded on racism. . . . America can be post racial like it could be post dinosaur right, I mean something has to hit America, and we have to turn into something else, so it was founded on racism.

Tracy told me she thinks her comments about racism entrenched in American society are “a little bit more on the liberal side” since she lives in rural Georgia. She recognizes that her conservative colleagues might disagree with her statements about how racism is so closely tied to the growth and development of the United States. This reflects Tracy’s local context. When teachers from Illinois make similar comments about systemic racism, they did not add any caveats that their views were more “liberal” or describe how their colleague might strongly disagree with them.

While some teachers from Florida and Georgia, like Megan and Tracy, describe racism in similar ways to the teachers in Illinois, there are important differences as well. Megan and Tracy’s own beliefs do not always completely align with teachers from Illinois. Additionally, other teachers from the South hold vastly differing views. As Tracy continued to talk about critical race theory later in the interview, she describes:

> Well, it wasn’t me; it wasn’t you [who participated in slavery]. It wasn’t anything that I did. The part of critical race theory that I disagree with is the reparations, you know, because I don’t think that anybody needs to be paid for what happened 400 years ago.

While Tracy described how racism is systemically incorporated into American society, she shirked personal responsibility. In stating, “it wasn’t me; it wasn’t you,” she distances herself and current students from the actions of historical racists and aligns herself with teachers who de-emphasize the continued advantages whites have today that stem from past racism.

Jason makes a similar comment to Tracy: “I don’t try to make them feel bad, you know. Especially my kids who are white, I don’t try to make them feel that. Like ‘I know your ancestor

[trails off].' I don't do that." As does Derek. After describing how he hopes his students come away with a more honest understanding of the origin of the United States and how that still affects us today, Derek states:

> And like I'm definitely not into the "woe is me because I'm a white male or anything." but what I always say is to my other white male students, "when we're talking about this, and slavery's horrible, and people did horrible things, I'm not telling you to hate yourself for being white. I'm just saying this is what it is. You're aware of it, and then it's up to you to decide whether or not you want to fix it."

These caveats southern teachers add to their statements about slavery are unique to them. None of the teachers I interviewed from Illinois included statements of this kind. I highly doubt any of them encourage white self-hatred or students of color to hate whites as that would be counter-productive to their goals of understanding multiple perspectives and student growth or development. Importantly, and in contrast to teachers I interviewed from the South, they did not see the need to add this clarification when talking with me. Whether or not these clarifying statements from southern teachers arise from personal beliefs or experiences of pushback for their teaching styles, it points to a situation in which southern teachers are more cautious about discussing racism in a straightforward manner. We can see this reticence arising from the context and milieu of the South where views on racism are more divergent and controversial.

So far, we have seen some southern teachers keen on expanding students' understandings that race issues still affect us today and some who add caveats to this understanding. Other politically right-leaning southern teachers, however, have very different views on racism. Kelly, who described challenging her students to research their beliefs on abortion, spent an extended amount of time discussing the ways she and her white students faced racism. Although, she also

emphasized that they experienced less racism than her Black students. Kelly asks her students:

> "How many of you have experienced racism before?" And you'll have white and Black [kids] raise their hands. And then also "how many of you have experienced it on a daily basis?" And it's always only Black kids. And I say, "now I want you to look around the room and see what if you were the one who experienced it daily?" Because I've experienced racism as a white woman, I taught in all Black schools, and I experienced some of the worst racism of my life. They called [me] things that I never thought I would be called, but if I had experienced that all the time, I would probably be an angry person.

Sociologists often define racism as "a system of racial inequality that benefits whites at the expense of people of color" (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 265). This means "no black American or other American of color can be racist in the deepest sense of this concept" (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 95). Others, however, frequently describe prejudice based on race as racism, like Kelly does. While Kelly's definition of racism does not match that of a sociologist, she points out that her Black students experience racism much more regularly than her white students. She tries to use that to explain how we do not know where someone is coming from or why they might be acting in a certain way because we do not have the same experiences as them. Kelly aims to use this lesson to promote one of the overarching learning goals history teachers have: developing respect for those who have different backgrounds or experiences.

Another teacher, Dustin, had an unconventional goal for his students' learning about race; he wants students to come away with, "an understanding of how the Democrat party is largely responsible for our country's poor race relations." In this case, Dustin is referring to the one-party Jim Crow South and not the modern-day Democratic Party. Dustin continues, "The Democrat party is the party of Indian Removal, slavery, the KKK, and Jim Crow." To be sure,

Dustin was not the only teacher I interviewed who described how students are often surprised that the Democratic Party played a major role in defending slavery and racism. None of the other teachers, however, said that was the main understanding they want students to develop. While Dustin is a bit of an outlier, his unique views illustrate that not all teachers from the South have the same goals; there is more diversity in their hopes for students and in their understandings of racism and racial history. These discussions of racism and slavery illuminate the setting in which teachers from Florida and Georgia teach. While teachers in Illinois are relatively on the same page, differences between teachers from these two southern states reflect differences in beliefs in their communities and a more fractured and contentious context. Only 30 percent of white Southerners believe that socioeconomic differences between white and Black Americans are due to discrimination whereas 44 percent of white Southerners believe the differences are due to a lack of will (*Get GSS Data | NORC*, 2018). This context affects the closeness of the current curricular challenges to these teachers which I examine in the next chapter.

While teachers from the South have more varying views and ways of teaching about racism than the teachers I interviewed from Illinois, most every teacher focused on the ways racism disadvantaged Black and Hispanic students. And almost none of the teachers I interviewed in the North or South discussed the ways whites benefit from this inequality. To be sure, I never asked a question specifically about white privilege. Yet, we spent a substantial proportion of each interview talking about race issues, meaning there was time for it to arise.

An exception is Lisa who mentions white privilege. Perhaps this is because Lisa has a master's degree in applied sociology and is familiar with these discussions. Lisa states:

> A lot of my students do not believe that white privilege exists. That can be, it can be very difficult to try to get around or to explain it. And like I said, I think that might be why I'm

> not teaching that [U.S. history] right now, because I would be explaining that [white privilege] and parents might be getting upset with me.

Lisa's comment "parents might be getting upset with me" is commonly invoked by the teachers I interviewed. It shows how the surrounding community of where a teacher works affects their teaching and suggests that local characteristics affect the way teachers discuss and teach the history of race relations and slavery. Lisa is "pretty liberal and left leaning living in an uber conservative area." She teaches social studies in rural Georgia at a school which is over 70 percent white. While Lisa has taught U.S. history in the past, her school assigned her to teach economics this year. Lisa speculated to me, "I kind of think the reason that I might be teaching economics this year is because they were little scared to let me teach U.S. history. Again, in this current climate and things with CRT and all that." Lisa invokes both the area that she lives in and the present climate when discussing her current teaching situation. Historically, the South has been prone to fights over the presentation of the actions of white Southerners in classrooms. Groups such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which are both still in existence, led these charges (Zimmerman, 2002).

Concrete Curricular Challenges in Florida and Georgia

More teachers in the South who I interviewed are in communities which do not support the discussion of race-related topics. This takes place both in terms of the lack of institutional backing teachers receive surrounding discussions on race relations and the reactions they might elicit from the surrounding community. For instance, Lindsey who teaches in Atlanta, Georgia, states, "I have heard if you dive too deep on slavery some white parents do tend to be upset." Megan also describes how she has been told, "it's not my place necessarily to tell my students exactly what's happening, but that's their parents' job to educate them on what's happening in the

world, especially with current events with Black Lives Matter." From these comments, we see these teachers can face criticism for discussing race topics in their classrooms too much. As Fullan (2001) describes, parents and communities can be important partners in educational change, and they can also be limiting factors when they disagree with what takes place in their students' classrooms. In the South, this is more likely to occur surrounding race topics making curricular challenges appear in concrete ways for some southern teachers, particularly those who want students to grasp the role of race more fully in U.S. history. In the next chapter, we will explore how teachers respond to this perceived threat of criticism.

In addition to upset parents, a few southern teachers mentioned their administrators or states restricting how they teach about race relations for a variety of reasons. For instance, in response to white parents being upset about teaching about racism, Lindsey described, "Teachers do get messages from administrators on changing our teaching methods" surrounding how in-depth they discuss race-related issues. Administrators, and in particular the principal, are "most likely to be in a position to shape the organizational conditions" (Fullan, 2001, p. 83). Hence, they can play a large role in dissuading teachers from talking about controversial topics.

Also, some of the teachers I interviewed from Georgia described their states having standards or policies which limit the teaching of race relations. For instance, Michelle states, "if I taught just the straight Georgia Board of Education's standards, I'd say 5 of the 22 standards mention Blacks, and it's usually something tacked on to the end. I try to expand that." Since little in the Georgia standards focuses on Black history, it falls to individual teachers to enlarge their focus to include more lessons on Black Americans. When I looked at Georgia's standards, I found ten out of twenty-three standards make at least a vague reference to Black Americans. This, however, includes statements such as "[e]xamine the historic nature of the presidential

election of 2008" and "[d]escribe the emergence of modern forms of cultural expression including the origins of jazz and the Harlem Renaissance" (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Lisa also comments on the Georgia standards:

> Here in Georgia with the standards that we have, it is really hard to even get into some of the really interesting things. Some of the slave narratives and things of that nature. We do just have to - we have to get through the material.

Since the teachers must cover the material in the standards for the state test students take at the end of their course, there is not a lot of other room for teachers to expand upon the curricular guidance. So, teachers see the Georgia state guidelines as a limiting factor in the teaching of race relations and slavery. Being in the South with the history of white resistance to learning the fullness and contradictions of U.S. history (Zimmerman, 2002), teachers who want to dive deeper into anti-Black racism and the enduring impacts of slavery are largely on their own.

Given this environment and the lack of support teachers receive, it is unsurprising that for the teachers I interviewed in Florida and Georgia, knowledge about Black history and teaching race relations rarely comes from state, district, or school sources. Only one teacher from the South discussed institutional support which encourages the teaching of Black history or race relations. Megan discusses how the Florida standards consider African American history and the history of other marginalized groups. Indeed, every section in the Florida standards, has a benchmark like this one from the World War I period: "Compare the experiences Americans (African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, women, conscientious objectors) had while serving in Europe" (*Next Generation Sunshine State*, 2014). Yet, these standards do not always translate to support for teaching about diverse experiences or the lasting effects of past inequalities.

In contrast, most teachers from Florida and Georgia who discussed new learnings on

racism said it comes from their own studies or continuing education. Derek from Florida finds his curriculum, "from definitely personal reading. We don't have a ton of professional development here – definitely not professional development targeted to history classes or history teachers." Prior to this personal reading, Derek taught what he learned in school which was "the whitewashed stuff, which is totally normal, especially down South." Derek states, "I kind of was passing that on not maliciously," but he "would talk about things in that [the Civil War] was also about states' rights or that kind of stuff. And now I just don't really even entertain that per se." If Derek had not taken the initiative to keep educating himself on his own, he might still be teaching information which professional historians dismiss. This relates to the lack of institutional support and emphasis on history professional development along with the content teachers learn in teacher training programs. While this is not my thesis's focus, it is important to note that in Derek's official preparation to earn and maintain his teaching credentials, he did not spend extended time learning about slavery. This again points to the environment, in which teachers like Derek work, where some people still promote false narratives about the Civil War.

Like Derek, Lisa describes how she does a lot of personal reading. Showing me *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson about the Great Migration, she asked "Have you read this book? It's amazing." I responded I had not, and Lisa continued, "I've certainly upped my reading. I've got this one, and after I finish this is another one to get started on. I think that we have to constantly be educating ourselves." Lisa demonstrates a commitment to personally educate herself on U.S. history and particularly Black history to continue growing as a teacher.

Not every teacher has the time, resources, or inclination to put in this amount of extra time learning. Lisa told me she recommends the books she reads to her colleagues. She says, however, "Now, will they read it? No. I don't know, maybe teachers in other areas that aren't so

white and conservative would have a different response, but I mean that's been my experience here. Yeah, it's all on me." The teachers who put in the extra effort to continue educating themselves are unique among their colleagues. The southern teachers I interviewed mostly do not receive professional development from their schools or districts to understand slavery and racism more fully. In the case of Georgia, the state does not encourage teaching these topics. To echo Lisa's statement – it is all on them. This differs sharply from Gina's experience where history teachers in her district sat down together to make their curriculum more inclusive. Because of this, southern U.S. history teachers tend to face curricular challenges more directly.

Abstract Curricular Challenges in Illinois

In contrast to the South, overall, Illinois teachers operate in a setting more supportive of teaching about slavery and racism in the United States. Few teachers in Illinois discussed parents challenging them or administrators telling them to not address slavery or racism. These differences in environment can make a distinction in how open teachers are to addressing racism head-on in the classroom (Fullan, 2001). In addition, the different setting means that teachers in Illinois rarely experienced specific curricular challenges from conservative critics, whether that be parents or politicians. Still, many mentioned them in the abstract. For instance, some teachers from Illinois discuss debates in other states. Paul describes, "It's unfortunate that they hijacked the term critical race theory because it takes away, doing my own research, it takes away from what the actual topic is. Because now you got states like Florida banning it." Matthew also describes, "But when I hear about states that, for example, want to call, what did they call it? Slavery was Something Labor. They, I don't know if you heard, that it was Texas." While Matthew could not remember the exact reference (possibly it was to a 2015 story of a Texas textbook describing enslaved Africans in the immigration chapter as "workers" arriving in the

United States), he references a challenge which does not affect him personally (Isensee, 2015).

Not every teacher from Illinois, however, discussed the challenges surrounding teaching racism and slavery in remote terms. Christopher, who teaches in a moderately conservative area of rural Illinois, states:

> Whenever there is something that's controversial you run the risk of students and therefore parents hearing it and then turning off. . . . And I'm not going to risk that with my kids. I teach primarily white kids who need it, and I can't risk them checking out because I've used language that they're conditioned to not like.

Christopher holds similar fear to some of the southern teachers of parents getting upset at his teaching content. In contrast to Paul and Matthew, Christopher does not experience the current history curricular debates in the abstract. He worries that parents and students in his district could react negatively to him diving too deeply into racial issues which might be seen as controversial. Christopher's statement reveals that regional differences between the North and South cannot fully describe the ways teachers currently experience and respond to the curricular debates.

Local Differences

Of the teachers interviewed, there are divides which transcend region and instead correspond to whether the teachers teach in a mostly white school district or a district that has predominantly students of color. Nine times out of ten, student demographics align with school location, with urban areas more likely to have majority students of color and rural and suburban areas more likely to have a large white student population. Additionally, every urban area in my study also leans liberal and only one of the suburban and rural areas leans liberal with the rest leaning conservative as shown in Appendix 1. This roughly aligns with national trends where urban areas have more registered Democratic voters and rural areas more Republican voters.

Suburban areas are more mixed and fall somewhere in between (Parker et al., 2018). These local characteristics reinforce each other and influence teachers in a way similar to regional location.

The student demographics of the schools in my study reveal patterns of a segregated education system. Upon organizing the schools by the percent of the student body that is white, I had on one end schools that are over 99 percent students of color. At the other extreme, I had a school that is nearly 90 percent white, which is the school where Christopher teaches in rural Illinois. That fact in and of itself is not remarkable as school segregation is a well-known and much-studied phenomenon (e.g., Fiel, 2015; Reardon & Owens, 2014). However, seven out of the eight schools in Illinois are on the extremes of being mostly students of color or mostly white, with all the schools from the South falling between these extremes. My sample of schools aligns with the broader trend in Illinois, Florida, and Georgia. In the 2011 to 2012 school year, Orfield et al. (2014) found schools in Illinois were more segregated than schools in Florida and Georgia on five out of six different segregation measurements.

The largest difference between teachers of students who are majority students of color and student bodies that are largely white is the way they discuss their hopes for their students after lessons around slavery and race relations. Some teachers in majority white schools focused more on the idea that students need to know that race issues still affect the United States today. They think their students might not be aware of that because they live in an insulated, majority-white community. Gina in Illinois describes this most succinctly:

> Primarily because 60% of our population is white, I hope they come away with a better understanding of how something like slavery could still be impacting us today. We often hear people say “I didn't have slaves; my grandparents didn't have slaves. Why are we still being punished for this? Why is this still a thing?” Because we need to recognize that

> over generations racism has caused problems even into today.

Gina hopes that her students gain an understanding and empathy for the way others experience the world, even if they do not regularly see the problems racism causes. This goal fits in with the broader goal of gaining respect for those who have different experiences and beliefs that many teachers hold for their students. While the specifics of this hope are different for Gina and other teachers of mostly white students, the overarching idea is the same.

Michelle, who teaches in a rural area of Georgia that is majority white and conservative, has a similar hope for her students as Gina does. Michelle states:

> I hope they come away with a much more complete understanding of how race relations have shaped our country today. I hope students realize that our history is complicated and not always pretty. And I'll be candid here, as I teach in the deep South, I hope to see students stop embracing the Confederate flag as a positive symbol.

Here regional and local factors come together to influence the way Michelle wants her students to gain understanding of other perspectives and a knowledge of the content about race relations in the United States.

We see the combined influence of regional and local factors most clearly on the Chicago teachers. Chicago is deeply and profoundly segregated, and this is reflected in schools. The city has a large minority student population and looks for innovative ways to support student education. In Aaron's U.S. history class, he sees himself "deconstructing popular narratives and trying to maybe restructure history and not a dominant narrative, not a Eurocentric view on what history is." He wants to be "reconstructing history to incorporate more diverse points." This description is not too far off from the work that the other teachers I interviewed from Chicago describe doing to incorporate a wider variety of perspectives into their classes. Additionally, the

description aligns with historical trends. For instance, in the 1960s, Chicago provided Black history electives in high schools. But, students did not express interest in them in predominately white schools, so only schools with mostly students of color kept them (Zimmerman, 2002).

More broadly speaking, this is similar to the discourse which took place 90 years ago. White school boards in the North and South often encouraged Black students to learn about Black history. They, however, did not try to teach the same history to their white students (Zimmerman, 2002). There were white and Black educators and activists who supported Black history, as long as only Black students learned it. While multicultural education for all students is much more widely accepted today as is evidenced in my interviews, the vestiges of segregated schools and segregated history education still are found today.

For instance, many teachers discussed their hopes for students in terms of race relations in much more concrete terms for their students of color than their white students. Aaron describes, “I think history is a great tool, that we have something interesting to practice skills, and also give them tools of liberation from the change that might keep them down generationally.” Tracy also has a similar desire. She hopes for her Black students, especially her Black male students, “that they see that there's more out there than what you see. That your reality doesn't have to be your future, doesn't have to be your destiny. That you can flip that script, that you can change.” These teachers seek to use history as an example of how students can make a better life for themselves and overcome the generational hardships they have experienced. Teachers of students of color discuss how this is relevant because they know their students and their students’ ancestors have experienced this inequality.

In contrast, teachers of white students wanted them to be aware that racism is a problem, but they rarely focus on the impact it has on their students’ lives. I cannot verify what teachers

tell me and see what is going on in their classrooms. This suggests, however, that perhaps students of color are being prepared to face racial issues and deal with the challenges of inequality while white students are less likely gain the same education and see the role they can play in reducing inequality. Research shows that when students learn to respect those of different identities along with discussions of historical and contemporary racism, it helps all students, including white students, to become more aware of their implicit biases (Byrd, 2016). Hence, there are benefits to all students learning about race issues in concrete terms. That is not to say that every teacher of white students does not do a good job encouraging their students to see the role they can play in making the United States more equitable. For instance, Lisa states:

> I hope students come away more anti-racist. You know, it used to just be – I can say that I'm not racist – but there has to be action behind those words. It can't just be a lie learned in class. I want them, I hope that as they go out and become involved citizens that they are citizens that are a voice for change.

While Lisa is unique in this evocation of hoping students will become anti-racist, her hope that students become involved citizens is not rare at all as it stems from the citizenship goals that are widely held among U.S. history teachers. Today, however, Lisa is still afraid for her job if she dives too deeply into racism and what it means to be anti-racist. Clearly, the long history of contention about race in U.S. history classrooms is not over.

Overall, teachers' views on racism and how much support they have or challenges they face in teaching race-related topics emerge from and reveal the local and regional environment in which teachers operate. This fits in with a conception of places having their own different discursive configurations, character, and traditions (Molotch et al., 2000). We look more closely at how these regional and local differences affect teachers and how teachers respond to

conservative critics in the next chapter through a discussion of a teaching resource which is often evoked when it comes to these curricular challenges: the 1619 Project.

Chapter 5: The 1619 Project and Teachers' Responses to Conservative Critics

Two years ago, 400 copies of the 1619 Project arrived in Aaron's Chicago classroom. Aaron describes how it occurred:

> It came from nowhere, literally they just dropped off this box and said, "hey you got to teach this now." It's actually so fascinating to me because I don't agree with these right-wing people's view on it, but I do think it's great that it literally just showed up. It was just in my room. They were like, "you got to teach this magazine stuff." It's crazy. And I don't even know, no one talked to me about it. It just popped up in my room one day.

This appearance of the *New York Times Magazine* issues of the 1619 Project is a part of a broader push by the Chicago Public Schools to incorporate more diverse teaching materials into their curriculum and become a more equitable school district (*Equity at CPS*, n.d.). The Chicago Public Schools publicly adopted the 1619 Project in their social studies classrooms shortly after its publication in 2019. They, however, are unique in their district-wide push of the project. Only a handful of other districts have quite so publicly adopted the 1619 Project in their schools, including Buffalo, New York; Newark, New Jersey; and Washington D.C. (Riley, 2020).

The 1619 Project fits in with the Chicago Public Schools' plans to improve student achievement, which draws from research about multicultural education. Activists and scholars often discuss culturally responsive teaching and content relating to students' own racial or ethnic group as a buffer against lower quality educational outcomes (Byrd, 2016; Epstein, 2008; Gay, 2010). At the Chicago Public Schools, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students graduate at lower rates than their white and Asian peers (*Metrics | Chicago Public Schools*, n.d.). Since

over 80 percent of the students who attend Chicago schools are Black or Hispanic, the district is looking for innovative ways to support student learning. They draw on many teaching resources, in addition to the 1619 Project, which center the experiences of Black and Hispanic Americans.

While the Chicago Public Schools see the 1619 Project as a useful teaching resource, it is highly critiqued by conservative critics, and reactions to it exemplify current contention surrounding history education in the United States. The teachers I interviewed for this project have a wide range of views on the 1619 Project itself and its value as a resource for teaching. This chapter looks more closely at how teachers describe having used or not used the 1619 Project in their discussion of slavery and race relations in their classrooms. Additionally, it considers how that curricular decision fits in, reinforces, or intervenes in the practices taking place in high school U.S. history classrooms.

I argue, specifically, that teachers' responses to the 1619 Project are less affected by the politics of the moment than critics imagine. Rather, they are grounded in their professional commitments to support student learning alongside their very real time and capacity constraints. The U.S. history teachers I interviewed believe in the historical fact about the impact of racism and slavery on U.S. society and desire to see students develop as citizens and know their nation's history. This directly guides their reaction to conservative challenges to history education. Even if teachers do not use the 1619 Project, they still describe teaching about slavery and racism in similar ways. Although teachers are aware of contention surrounding the content taught in U.S. history classes and in some cases make curricular decisions based on these conflicts, their teaching methods and materials involve as minimal impact from outsiders as their situation allows. For these reasons, I conclude teachers mostly hold negative views of these conservative challenges and critics.

Benefits and Challenges of Using the 1619 Project

Bringing the 1619 Project into classrooms, whether that be history, English, journalism, art, or other classes, was never meant to completely replace the work teachers are already doing. The 1619 project offers materials that teachers can use to complement their already established curricula and lessons. Indeed, the Pulitzer Center, which partnered with the *New York Times* to bring the 1619 Project into classrooms, states, "The 1619 Project is not a complete history of the United States, but, rather, expands our collective understanding of the legacy of slavery in America and the contributions of Black Americans to the nation" (Pulitzer Center, n.d., p. 2).

Correspondingly, the teachers I interviewed who use the project do so in small ways. Paul from Chicago describes, "I use it as supplemental material. It's not something that my whole day is based upon." Mary, who teaches in Florida, likewise explains, "I've pulled different articles and pieces of information" to help students learn about slavery and race relations. Derek, who is also from Florida, is pretty sure he came across the 1619 Project through Twitter. He subsequently said he started to use some of the writing in the 1619 Project at the beginning of his U.S. history classes when teaching about slavery. Whether these teachers found the project on their own like Derek or are in a district which requires them to use it like Paul, the initial use of the 1619 Project in their classrooms was nothing out of the ordinary. These teachers thought the project could provide valuable insight into U.S. history. Thus, they used it in a similar way to the over 85 percent of social studies teachers who assign supplemental texts in their classrooms (*National Assessment of Educational Progress*, 2010). Mary expresses that, to her, the purpose of history education in public schools is "to teach how we came to where we are today as a society - the good, the bad, and the ugly." The use of the 1619 Project is one source, out of many, to support student understanding of how our current society came to be.

In many cases, the 1619 Project fits in with how teachers already teach about the history of slavery and Black Americans. For instance, when Aaron read over the 1619 Project magazine that showed up in his classroom, he remembers thinking, "we talked about this; we had kind of built this stuff up already. I've been teaching it." Aaron goes on to describe how he uses the 1619 Project to promote critical thinking in his classroom. The main idea he wants students to get out of the project is "do you agree that this is how we should look at history? Or should we kind of go with the narrative that we have already told ourselves? Can we maybe incorporate all of it in?" Ultimately, Aaron wants students to both develop their own opinions on the founding narrative of the United States and to realize that they do not need to view America's founding only through the traditional lens or through the lens of the 1619 Project. The ability to hold seemingly conflicting ideas in one's mind simultaneously is a hallmark of critical thinking and necessary to promote understanding of those with differing beliefs from oneself. Both the ideas in the 1619 Project and the value of promoting citizenship abilities characterized Aaron's teaching practices prior to his use of the project in his class. Like other teachers I interviewed who use the 1619 Project, Aaron finds that it aligns with his teacher identity of helping students develop their own opinions, knowledge of U.S. history, and awareness of multiple viewpoints.

Despite the 1619 Project fitting in with the goals teachers have for their students, each Chicago teacher that I interviewed thinks in some ways it is not the most effective teaching tool for them. They evaluate the project, and other teaching materials, based on their personal time constraints and how effectively it meets students' academic needs. Aaron recalls, "When I first got it [the 1619 Project], I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to do with it" because "they send this magazine. This magazine has no real lessons in it." The initial lack of curriculum made it a less useful teaching tool. As a public-school teacher with many demands upon his time,

Aaron is not always ready to jump into the next new change in education. Ultimately, Aaron incorporated the 1619 Project into his curriculum because his district required it. Other teachers, however, might not want to invest the time to develop a new lesson, which is common in education and we will shortly see is the case for some teachers I interviewed who are not mandated to use the 1619 Project (Binder, 2002; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

Chicago teachers also described the reading level of the 1619 Project posing a challenge for their students. From an educational psychology perspective, teachers ideally try to assign materials which promote student growth but are not so challenging that students cannot engage with them on their own (Horowitz et al., 2005). Both Daniel and Paul teach students with special education needs. Consequently, they find the 1619 Project material is at an inappropriate reading level for their students. Daniel describes, “I've tried to modify it for my kids’ reading levels. I'm like, I'm gonna have to rewrite this whole book. It's not designed for them. But, we still have to teach it to them.” Paul articulates a similar situation, “I have a lot of diverse learners, so I have to break it down and make the letters bigger. Highlight situations. There's a lot of things I gotta do in order for the material to work for my students.” If students cannot read material without a lot of extra support from their teacher, it is harder for them to learn the content. The reservations Daniel and Paul have about the 1619 Project come out of their daily reality as teachers. As trained educators, they rely on their knowledge and experience about what makes for a quality lesson to examine the 1619 Project. Overall, Daniel, Paul, and Aaron, approach this contentious material not from the perspective of what “liberals” or “conservatives” might think; they do as Daniel prescribes for teachers to “read it yourself, make your own decision.”

An additional concern Daniel has about the 1619 Project stems from its emphasis on Black Americans. For a project that is meant to increase the diversity of perspectives on U.S.

history, Daniel thinks it lacks diversity in content and "doesn't take into consideration other populations that are not white or Black." Since Daniel teaches mostly Hispanic students, he finds that they do not immediately see the relevance of the 1619 Project to their lives. This makes it harder to engage students with the readings. Overall, the Chicago teachers decide if the project will help student learning based on student needs and interests. Their concerns surrounding the 1619 Project, which are student-centered and grounded in their experience and expertise, are largely not mentioned in any of the public debates about whether it should be taught in schools.

The ability of Chicago teachers to focus solely on the merits of the 1619 Project from a teachers' perspective in part stems from their location in Chicago. The trenchant resistance to teaching new material about slavery and race spurred by the 1619 Project seem to be further away for Chicago teachers, since they are in a Northern, liberal city. As such, these teachers seem to disregard the current contention. Daniel describes, "So I mean, I heard people were complaining, but I never, I never looked it up. I never paid attention to it." For teachers like Daniel, Paul, and Aaron who work in Chicago, they are in a setting that is, as Aaron describes, "a major city, so my whole life is very blue" meaning liberal or democratic. Because they live in this environment which is, relatively speaking, more supportive of teaching race issues, Aaron has a hard time seeing why people find the 1619 Project problematic. He states, "I find the old dialog to just be kind of tired at this point." As Aaron's and Daniel's responses illustrate, teachers in regions with little pushback from the community or conservative political activists and who also have active support from their district to address the continuing impacts of slavery and racism can simply ignore these debates. This finding supports what previous studies on U.S. history education have found that areas with large populations of students of color and certain states are more likely to teach an accurate depiction of Black history (Duncan et al., 2020;

Goldstein, 2020; Zimmerman, 2002).

Not Using the 1619 Project for Logistical and Non-Logistical Reasons

The teachers from Chicago were not the only ones to express logistical rather than ideological concerns about the 1619 Project. Those teachers not mandated to use the 1619 Project had hesitations about it which sometimes relate to whether using the 1619 Project will fit in with their schedule, meet the needs of their students, replicate material they already use, or be an unnecessary add-on to their curriculum. Like the Chicago teachers, other teachers evaluate the 1619 Project based on the answer to two questions: does the teacher have the capacity and desire to add in a new lesson? And would the new lesson help teachers achieve their content and citizenship goals for their students?

Tracy from Georgia is one of the teachers who does not feel she has enough time to add in supplemental material to her curriculum. She states:

> We're on a semester, so we have block scheduling. And that pushes us, right? And we got to get the EOC, the end of course test, standardized tests in December and we got to give it again in May. So, I don't have time to do big, huge projects, I just don't have the time. Anything that I find that I like, I typically modify it and make it work for my context.

Even though Tracy earlier stated that she could use modified pieces of the 1619 Project in her classroom, she has not and likely will not because of time constraints. Tracy sees the 1619 Project from the perspective of a teacher with pressures coming from school administrators and the state to help students perform well on high-stakes state examinations. This suggests that the information covered on state exams and how the exams are assessed largely drives what students learn in the classroom, which education literature supports (Journell, 2010). These sorts of logistical concerns that Tracy and the Chicago teachers described are important for

understanding how teachers approach choosing curriculum for their classroom before the issue of considering public opinion on the materials arises.

Additionally, some teachers feel that they already teach content addressing the themes of the 1619 Project. They see no need to adjust their lessons due to the publication of a magazine tackling slavery and Black history. In response to my question if Christopher would ever use the 1619 Project in his classroom, Christopher states, "I'd say it's a possibility that I could use it, but I won't in part because we're already teaching the core of what the 1619 project is aiming towards." Tyler, who teaches in rural Illinois like Christopher, responds to the same question:

> No, but I have already been teaching about topics covered in the Project. For example, I have been teaching about redlining even though I do not use the article "What does a traffic jam in Atlanta have to do with segregation? Quite a lot." The same is true with racial prejudice laying the groundwork for economic inequality, that sugar was a driving force behind slavery, and that America's promise that all men are equal fell flat without the exhaustive push for Civil Rights. The bulk of the material is already included in my lessons as it should be for all history teachers.

The history which the 1619 Project promotes in a journalistic form is not new. It may seem new to some people because it is not mainstream knowledge, but the project builds upon work done by historians for decades (Waldstreicher, 2020).

Fullan (2001, Chapter 5) describes that new reforms or initiatives flounder in schools if teachers do not see a need for it. Some teachers, like Christopher and Tyler, already have curriculum and content that they think teaches their students what they want them to know and meets state standards. They are then less likely to put in extra work to incorporate the 1619 Project. It can be easier to stick with what teachers know than continuously venture into new

curriculum, the planning for which must often take place on their own time (Broemmel et al., 2019). This fits in with Ozturk and Kus's (2019) finding that teachers worry more about creating an engaging classroom discussion when it comes to controversial topics than backlash from parents. To be sure, these logistical concerns were not the only reasons why Christopher and Tyler told me they would not use the 1619 Project in their classrooms. I discuss these shortly. It is important to note, however, that when teachers evaluate whether they might use the 1619 Project in their classroom or teach about a controversial topic, they want to make sure the topic will fit into the constraints of their specific classroom environment, and they only have a certain capacity to add in new teaching materials.

Another central finding of my study is that six of the teachers I interviewed had never heard of the 1619 Project. This is true despite the public attention and political contention the project and Nikole Hannah-Jones have garnered. In July 2021, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found that over half of Americans had never heard of the 1619 Project (Duran & Jackson, 2021). This would make the 30 percent of teachers that I interviewed who had never heard of the 1619 Project a smaller percentage than the public. Since schools and districts often do not put aside time for history professional development and the sharing of new resources (Broemmel et al., 2019; Fullan, 2001), history teachers who want to learn about new curriculum and up-to-date scholarship often must do so on their own time. Research shows that teachers do not always invest a lot of time in leisure or professional learning (Nathanson et al., 2008). Broemmel et.al. find that only 30 percent of teacher survey respondents had read professionally in the week prior to the survey and another 30 percent in the month prior (Broemmel et al., 2019, pp. 9–10). Given the number of responsibilities teachers have – which have only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic – it perhaps makes sense that some teachers might not be reading a lot or looking

for new curricular resources and missed the news coverage of the 1619 Project.

Of the Americans who have heard of the 1619 Project, many have strong reactions to the project, either favorably or against. Since views of the 1619 Project often line up with political party affiliation, some teachers are mindful of public opinion about the project. In addition to Christopher not using the 1619 Project because he already teaches similar content as discussed above, he worries about upsetting parents if he starts using the 1619 Project. He states:

> I mean for us. It'll draw a lot more parent concern if we were to say we're teaching the 1619 Project than if we say we're going to teach about the history of slavery in America and the long-term impacts that happened. Because of the media that parents watch, they get turned off by certain words even if it means the same thing as what we're already doing. So, we're not using a 1619 curriculum but we're teaching the same sort of thing and 1619 was trying. Yeah, it's kind of political and dumb.

Despite Christopher thinking that it is "political and dumb," he still worries that people might think, "oh he's teaching the 1619 Project because he's, you know, this uber liberal, liberal. I don't need to listen to this. This is propaganda." Rather than risk this happening, Christopher teaches similar ideas without the contentious material. As discussed last chapter, he wants kids to understand the way racism affects the United States today. And Christopher thinks it is better for his mostly white students to understand that using materials other than the 1619 Project than try to use the 1619 Project and get nowhere. Overall, twin forces affect Christopher's response to the 1619 Project – he does not feel the need to add new curriculum to his teaching arsenal and if he were to add this specific material, he worries he might put himself in the line of fire.

While Christopher's choices acknowledge the existence of conservative critics, he reports that he has not made any changes to his teaching practices by refraining from using the 1619

Project in his classroom. Michelle is in a similar situation to Christopher. Michelle understands the 1619 Project as "a different (non-traditional) interpretation of U.S. History based on making race central." When I asked her if she had any reservations about it, she responds, "I know if I even mention the 1619 Project, I will have parents calling up the school screaming for my removal. So, I am hesitant to use it directly." Michelle describes self-censoring by not including the 1619 Project in her curriculum based on what she thinks parents will complain about. She does this in hopes of continuing to teach without dealing with the potential fallout of upset parents. When I asked Michelle if current debates about what should and should not be taught in U.S. history classes affect her teaching, she responds, "Not yet. I have decided to keep teaching how I teach. If parents complain, I'll figure it out from there." Since the debate has not directly reached her classroom door, Michelle believes it is necessary for students to continue gaining an understanding of the role of slavery and race relations in U.S. history, fitting with education literature which argues teaching the history of all ethnic groups helps students gain the necessary knowledge and perspective to effectively participate in our multicultural society (Banks, 2003). At the same time, though, Michelle is aware of these debates and that she might not be able to hold off parents "screaming for her removal" forever simply by not using the 1619 Project. At that point, she will have to decide whether to stand her ground or bend to parental concerns.

Michelle has another issue with the 1619 Project that is neither logistical in nature nor about parental concerns. Rather, it results from some of the criticisms the 1619 Project received. One of Michelle's concerns about the project is that "some historians have spoken out about many of the essays and contributions as they do not necessarily follow an academically historical approach." A couple of other teachers referenced the historians who spoke out about the historical accuracy of the project too. For instance, Tyler states:

> The only reservations I have are some more extreme claims that are not based as solidly in history and fact but are in some ways hyperbolized. For example, the 1619 Project took a huge and overly simplistic assertion that the Revolutionary War was fought to preserve slavery; again, some good history in their evidence but the conclusion masks a lot of confounding factors.

The central conclusion I draw from all my interviews with history teachers is that they are largely focused on trying to teach accurate history. Since the 1619 Project is a journalistic work and has received criticism by some historians, some teachers are worried about using it in their classrooms. Even though the overall goal of the project to bring Black history to the forefront of American history is laudable and the role of defending slavery in the Revolutionary war is a topic of debate among professional historians (Waldstreicher, 2020), these teachers are still wary of using the 1619 Project to make these points since it has become politicized. This is true even when they cover the same or similar content using other sources.

In a statement similar to the one made by Daniel who observed that the 1619 Project places too much emphasis on white-Black relations, Tyler also worries that the 1619 Project focuses on one group to the exclusion of others in the same way mainstream history privileges whites and other elites. He states:

> The other claim that the true founding of America occurred in 1619, to me doesn't correct the issue of ignoring parts of American history, it just changes the focus of American history to another group. If I am teaching the entire breadth of U.S. history I cannot and should not solely focus on the experiences of one group. Rather each group and their experience need to be told. I do not wish to give any group the sole title of starting America. For me American history begins when the first prehistoric human crossed into

North America some 1100 years ago.

Tyler's statement reveals that he, while wanting to discuss the experiences of Black Americans, also values showcasing those of other marginalized groups. This response to the 1619 Project comes out of Tyler's teaching needs and goals. Additionally, Tyler's emphasis on multiculturalism is a newer development in the history of teaching U.S. history (Binder, 2002; Nash et al., 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). It shows, however, that values in the teaching profession evolve over time and that teachers sometimes buy into a proposed change in curriculum – something they mostly do not do with current conservative views of U.S. history. Despite some teachers having concerns and critiques of the 1619 Project like Tyler thinking it is not multicultural enough, they are minor compared to their rejection of the challenges coming from conservative activists seeking to limit discussion of inequality and bias in the classrooms.

The only teacher I interviewed who seems to agree with the views conservative critics have about the 1619 Project is Dustin. Dustin teaches in Florida and believes the 1619 Project is "built upon a false premise and is highly political." He says, "people want nothing to do with the 1619 project here." He also describes the 1619 Project as, "CRT [critical race theory] alt-history that is very misleading." Dustin filled out a written interview and did not elaborate more on these topics. His responses to many of the interview questions, however, varied greatly from the other teachers I interviewed. Dustin's statement that "people want nothing to do with the 1619 Project here" is not entirely accurate based on my findings from my interviews. I interviewed another teacher from Dustin's school who has used the 1619 Project in their classroom. This shows that even teachers within the same school are not on the same page. This can take place in schools around the country as teachers are often very isolated from each other and do not always receive a lot of time to work on curriculum together (Fullan, 2001). Given the reaction Dustin had to my

questions about the 1619 Project, it might make sense that the teacher who does use it did not want to share their use of it with their colleagues. Dustin's comments once again show what we established in the previous chapter, namely that the South is home to a lot of contention surrounding the history of slavery and racism.

Due to the hostility people such as Dustin have towards the 1619 Project, Derek who previously used the 1619 Project in his class has decided he is no longer going to do so. He makes this change because he wants to avoid being "the poster child for brainwashing the kids." Derek states:

> I used to show stuff in the 1619 Project, but I don't this year. I find different ways to say the same information because I'm just avoiding those buzzwords, but we talked about slavery all the time because I teach U.S. history. I don't use the 1619 Project because of the backlash, but I find similar information from credible sources. . . . some of the students don't read their homework, let alone the parents are going to read it, so I'm just going to avoid that [the 1619 Project] and pick my battle.

Derek has "had this happen – random parent shoots off an email that I'm a commie brainwashing their kids" which makes him more cautious when it comes to the materials he uses in his classroom. Yet, he does not let the backlash to the 1619 Project change his thoughts on his core teaching content. Derek told me he draws on work by historians Gary Nash, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Hasan Kwame Jeffries.[13] These historians focus on the history of Black Americans and other marginalized groups. Based on the reaction conservative critics have to the 1619

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[13] Gary Nash is a well-known historian whose works emphasize the role of marginalized groups; he also co-directed the somewhat unsuccessful National History Standards project in the 1990s (Brenner, 2021). Annette Gordon-Reed is well-known among historians for her work changing the popular view on Thomas Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings (*Annette Gordon-Reed | Harvard Law School*, n.d.). Additionally, Hasan Kwame Jeffries focuses on African American history, and he consults with school districts to help them develop anti-racism programming (*Hasan Kwame Jeffries*, n.d.).

Project, they likely disagree with much of the work these historians do as well. Yet Derek relies on the assumption that parents do not actually care enough about U.S. history curriculum to read their children's homework. While Derek has described making a symbolic concession to the challenges from his conservative environment by putting aside the 1619 Project, he has not changed his teaching in the way conservatives would want.

Lisa, likewise, makes some changes to her teaching, or, rather, her administrators decided for her that she would teach economics and not U.S. history. But her philosophy about teaching on slavery or racism has not changed. When I asked Lisa, who is from Georgia, if she would ever use the 1619 Project, she responds:

> I mean, would I like to? Yes. Would I be nervous about doing that in this climate? Yes, which is sad, you know, but I gotta pay the bills . . . I think a lot of that stuff that is included in there [the 1619 Project] is important. I have referenced it to students, you know, to be like "oh feel free to go look this up." But yes, I think I would have to be very careful to include that in my content in U.S. history here. If I was in a different school system, probably not.

By censoring her teaching materials in small ways and teaching economics, a less controversial subject, Lisa describes holding onto both her values and her job. In doing so, Lisa allows the current climate surrounding history education to affect her teaching. On the surface this might seem like Lisa and similar teachers are bending to the desires of conservative critics. Yet, Lisa still articulates finding less blatant ways to bring discussions of racism into her classroom. Teachers like Lisa and Derek see themselves as avoiding intentionally provoking conservatives while not making major changes which conservatives might prefer.

Ultimately, some teachers describe self-censoring their teaching content in minor ways so

they can continue teaching about the effects of slavery on U.S. history in larger ways. In giving justifications for why teachers self-censored, none of them referenced the state laws against the 1619 Project and critical race theory. In fact, only one teacher referenced these state laws. Kelly from Florida mentioned to me that she is not allowed to teach critical race theory. So, I do not know the effect the legislation has on these teachers' decisions to not teach the 1619 Project or if they are unaware of them. The legislation, however, feeds into an environment where parents or community members feel entitled to complain about teachers' materials or practices.

Negative Responses to Conservative Critics

Overall, thirteen of the twenty teachers I interviewed express negative opinions of those parents, community members, and legislators who want teachers to place less emphasis on slavery or racism. While history education is in some ways "negotiable" as Binder (2002) found in her study on curricular challenges, there are certain aspects of history which are, to these teachers, non-negotiable. The role of slavery and racism in U.S. history seems to be one of these sticking points for the teachers I interviewed. So, with a few exceptions, teachers largely disagree with their conservative critics.

Derek from Florida describes, "As far as a teaching tool, it's just one of those things that people are going to demagogue it for political gain and that's just what they pick; they pick the 1619 project." Daniel from Chicago uses stronger words: "I honestly don't follow the bullshit. I read the material myself. I think it's good." He later continues, "I mean, I heard people were complaining, but I never looked it up. I never paid attention to it. I just looked at the materials myself and was like, I can use this." And, he says, "in terms of the debate, and my place in that or how I feel about it, I just wish people move on. Do something worth their time." Aaron from Chicago also describes: "I mean, I guess, I just see it like people are bored and want something

to talk about and the world's burning?" He continues,

> I would love to defend the 1619 Project. I'd love to be out there like "no, it's amazing." But I'm so jaded by politics at this point in my life that I would just bury my head in the sand and let other people that care more say what they say. As a teacher, I want to be like an advocate for those things in that perspective [but] in my mind I don't even need to advocate for it because this is just what we're going to do.

Derek, Daniel, and Aaron view the conservative criticism of the 1619 Project as political play. This, along with the clear role that slavery and anti-Black racism have played in U.S. history, means that these teachers, unlike some state legislators, do not feel any need to lend legitimacy to the concerns of conservatives.

The negative views teachers hold are not only about the 1619 Project but the current debates about teaching history in general. Tracy also makes a comment which shows that she sees present disputes as a non-genuine concern about children's education:

> I really think when I hear these people talking about parents upset and irate at what's going on in the schools, and you've never be concerned about what's going on in school before, like why now? Your kid misses three out of five days every week so clearly, you're not that concerned about what's happening to them in school, so um yeah, I think that has been pretty frustrating.

Tracy is frustrated that parents are upset about political issues but do not seem to care about their children's holistic education. Many teachers also view those who disagree with teaching about slavery and racism as uninformed or misinformed. Mary, who uses the 1619 Project in her Florida classroom, states it comprehensively:

> I think many Conservative whites from the South are so afraid to expose the histories of

> their families, that they do not want to revisit the past. They don't want to admit why things are the way they are - and I am 90% sure they don't *know* why things are the way they are. They've probably never heard of redlining. They probably think that "equal opportunity" actually means "equal opportunity." They probably don't know that Black workers were paid half the amount of white workers when they moved North to escape the South during the 2nd Industrial Revolution. They probably don't know, or don't want to remember that while whites were running from the cities to the suburbs, Blacks literally weren't allowed to move into the suburbs - and it wasn't because they were denied home loans - that was just icing on the cake. They don't want to remember that Blacks couldn't sit in the same lunch counters. They don't want to admit that the reason *most* southern schools with Confederate names out front were named in direct opposition to Brown v. Board of Education - not because they were so proud of the leaders. A lot of ignorance is driving the fear of teaching facts in our public schools. And quite frankly, many of the people getting so worked up about the whole thing, probably don't even have their kids attending public schools anyways.

In Mary's declaration about the ways white southern conservatives fear acknowledging the history of racism in the United States, she reveals her personal value of discussing how past race relations affect us today and discredits the concerns of conservative critics. Since Mary sees the conservative commentary as driven from ignorance and fear, she does not need to change her teaching methods to please them. Since these teachers generally do not view parents' and community members' concerns as legitimate, their responses to them are minimal, if they exist at all. This is the case even for teachers in southern or rural areas who fear backlash from conservative communities if they teach the 1619 Project.

In some cases, like Mary's, the debate about history education makes them feel better prepared to teach the history of slavery and racism. Mary states, "but just in case there is any question - I am prepared to defend my teaching more than I was in the past." A few teachers told me that this makes them see a greater importance for the types of conversations the conservatives want them to avoid. They find that the curricular challenges reinforce their teaching styles and values. Megan also feels that the current challenges to history education have challenged her to take stronger stances in her teaching. She states:

> It doesn't matter what kind of pushback I get. We're talking about history all of it – the good the bad and the really, really ugly. And I guess, you could say, I have become more emboldened to, you know, to teach what really happened.

Clearly, some teachers think they need to talk about all of U.S. history to be doing their jobs accurately. Matthew also asserts, that debate about history curriculum "reinforces the fact that you shouldn't whitewash history [and] I feel like I'm approaching it the right way, as far as race relations and in trying to provide a balanced treatment." When Matthew hears people on "both sides of the fence that would like to readjust history" he thinks that is a problem. Matthew believes that he needs to show multiple perspectives on history and slavery, and it is extra important that he does not only talk about the history of white Americans. The fact that he sees some conservatives wanting to do so means that it is even more necessary for people to know a comprehensive history of the United States. This points to an overarching idea which is central to the current contention surrounding U.S. history: the way conservative critics challenge the teaching of slavery and racism in U.S. history show that they have not fully developed the citizenship and content goals which U.S. history teachers have for their students. This makes it all the more necessary for teachers to achieve their goals for their students' learning.

Overall, U.S. history teachers see themselves as having an important role to play in society by educating the next generation of Americans to be critical thinkers who are conscious of America's past. Haley states, "through history class, I'm teaching you to become an adult one day and that there are historical things, government things that you're going to need to know as a successful adult." These teachers see themselves as, or at least hope they are, playing a small but important role in students' development as thinkers and citizens. While their job is currently under debate, they view developing an understanding of racism in U.S. history as too important to bend to conservative critics. They might make small changes to their classroom content, but none of the teachers I interviewed stopped talking about slavery or racism in depth because of the current climate. This is not to say that there are no real consequences from these debates for teachers and students. For instance, Lisa had a large shift in her teaching by moving to economics. Although, how much this has to do with the current climate is speculation without talking to her administrators directly. As a whole, the main point is even when U.S. history teachers experience the debates about what to teach directly, they remain devoted to their core value of promoting student learning, and their choices reflect the logistical constraints of the local, district, and state education contexts where they teach.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I motivated this research with two questions. (1) What do U.S. history teachers' perspectives add to the narratives in the public sphere surrounding teaching about past and present race relations in public school classrooms? (2) How do the environments surrounding U.S. history teachers affect their views on history education and how they teach about race relations in the United States? From interviews with twenty U.S. history teachers in Florida, Georgia, and Illinois, my study offers three main responses to these questions. First, I find that U.S. history teachers have a shared identity in which they focus on learning goals for students and the logistical constraints of teaching in public schools. Second, teachers bend as little as possible to conservative critics. Third, regional divisions between the North and South in the teaching of U.S. history still exist within the United States, but there are many crosscutting complexities in these divisions.

When we include teachers' voices in current debates about U.S. history, we discover a vast divide between the practical, on-the-ground concerns of teachers and the ideological concerns which non-educators espouse. This fits in with previous research findings that differences in level of conversation are common when those external to education systems try to impose change on professional educators (Fullan, 2001, p. 87). In the public sphere, conversation centers around how much teachers should emphasize inequalities within the United States, particularly surrounding the legacy of slavery and anti-Black racism. Frequently, interlocuters discuss this in relation to teaching the 1619 Project or critical race theory. There is little conversation about whether teachers feel they have the capacity to incorporate a new curriculum

into their classroom, regardless of their opinion on the content (e.g., Sawchuck, 2021; Waxman, 2021). When talking to history teachers, it becomes very clear that public conversations about what should be taught in U.S. history are divorced from the logistical constraints teachers face surrounding standardized testing, time to learn new curricula, and the challenges of engaging teenagers in content they might not be personally motivated to learn. Additionally, the conversations in the public sphere overlook the learning goals for students that all the teachers I interviewed prioritized. Most teachers want their students to leave their classes better prepared to engage in critical thinking and respectful conversation with others. Many also want their students to have a general knowledge of U.S. history which is not completely whitewashed.

Another aspect of teachers' identities which supports their learning goals for students is promoting a diversity of viewpoints in their classrooms – not their own. Conservative activists and politicians seem to think that teachers are willing to change their profession to cater to the agendas of those outside of the education system. Amid this politicized environment surrounding history, public school U.S. history teachers claim that they try to encourage students to develop the critical skills to reach their own opinions on issues. Many teachers make comments along the lines of this one Dustin makes, "I'm not in the business propagandizing students. The truth and facts speak for themselves, and students can come to their own conclusions." Although U.S. history teachers are discussing inherently political topics with their students, for the most part, they try to stay out of the political fray and teach what many describe as factual history. Overall, their professional identity shapes their response to critics, fitting in with previous works that consider professional identity (Binder, 2002; Lipsky, 1971).

My second finding is that history educators bend as little as possible to the current concerns of conservatives, avoiding the debates when they can. This is because the U.S. history

teachers I interviewed largely view the idea that slavery and racism still affect the nation today to be an uncontroversial issue, in contrast with the perspective of conservative critics. Additionally, they see the concerns of conservatives as mostly political rather than focusing on student educational outcomes. My finding supports previous work about curricular challenges. When teachers believe firmly in the legitimacy of a topic like the wrongness of Japanese Internment or evolution as a scientific theory, they resist those who disagree (Binder, 2002; Camicia, 2009). Camicia (2008) states “disagreements over whether an issue is open or closed are central to many curriculum controversies” (p. 301). In this case, most every teacher I interviewed thinks that the issue of racism having at least some impact on the present is a done deal. Consequently, they give less consideration to the concerns of those who disagree with them. For issues which teachers believe are still controversial, such as reparations for slavery, they try to be more mindful of showing multiple perspectives on the topic.

Most prior research on curricular challenges in social studies have considered specific case studies like Afrocentrism in two school districts and one state education agency (Binder, 2002), Japanese internment in the northwest (Camicia, 2008, 2009), and civil rights curriculum in Mississippi (Cunningham & Rondini, 2017). In most of these studies, curricular challenges took the form of parents or community members directly bringing concerns to education professionals. My study considers how teachers respond to curricular challenges in the public sphere. Teacher response aligns with how close the curricular challenge is to them. For instance, national public conversations in the media do not always directly affect teachers, so teachers largely ignore them and continue teaching as they desire. When the debates enter teachers’ regional and local communities, teachers grow more concerned that people in their district or surrounding area might begin to complain about their teaching. In these instances, some teachers

modify their curriculum to avoid potential conflicts. Four of the teachers I interviewed avoid key words and materials, like the 1619 Project. This shows that conservative critics have gained enough legitimacy in some local environments to cause teachers to respond to their concerns. Teachers do this, however, so they can continue teaching similar content as they always have. Thus, this self-censoring is largely a symbolic concession as Binder (2002) describes. The main point here is not that there are no real consequences to these debates, but that teachers remain devoted to their core values despite being challenged. In particular, a few teachers double down on their teaching and argue that it is even more important that students learn about this content and how to think critically about history and the present.

My third finding, in response to the second question about teachers' environments, is that despite many similarities between U.S. history teachers across Florida, Georgia, and Illinois, there are differences between teaching in the North and in the South of the United States. Namely, the South has more readily obvious contention surrounding understandings of slavery and racism than in the North. We see this in the different ways the southern teachers discuss racism and the more frequent challenges they receive from parents or administrators. Even 150 years after the Civil War and 50 years after the Civil Rights movement and the end of legal school segregation, the effects of these divisions are evident. This tracks the historical trends Zimmerman identified where there are differences in teaching methods in the North and South, particularly surrounding the Civil War (Zimmerman, 2002), and also parallels more recent work documenting state-level differences in U.S. history standards and textbooks (Duncan et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2020). Despite a nation-wide move toward valuing multiculturalism in education and real change and progress in schooling (Symcox, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002), historical differences between the North and South have not disappeared.

Historical and political contexts affect the way teachers teach about slavery and Black-white race relations in many complex ways. For instance, teachers in more rural, white, and conservative regions of the North, like Christopher, also fear backlash if they teach the 1619 Project or similar materials. And some teachers in the South do not worry about the way they teach about slavery and are ready to defend their teaching in the face of criticism. Moreover, each teacher approaches these topics in a personalized manner based on their own experiences and personalities. In this research, I tried to show the complexity of the U.S. history teaching profession and not blindly reinforce partisan divisions. Despite considering many factors which could relate to the differences in how teachers discuss slavery and race relations, there are clear ways in which the current polarized climate influences U.S. history teachers.

Ultimately, this study considered teacher response to two kinds of challenges to traditional U.S. history curriculum. One is the 1619 Project which seeks to shift the narrative about U.S. history to account for the ways it overlooks and downgrades Black history. The second is conservative critics who embrace a more monolithic version of U.S. history. They often promote a view of the United States as “exceptional” to imbue national pride in youth. There are many forces in education, however, which make it less likely for change to occur (Fullan, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 2009). Overall, my study found that a few teachers were self-motivated to continue learning and add new material to their curriculums. A few more teachers, like those in Chicago, had institutional support from their districts to make changes to teaching materials. The remaining teachers were not likely to adjust their curriculum by adding in the 1619 Project or removing controversial subjects. Additionally, teachers who use the 1619 Project in their classrooms were already teaching similar materials. For instance, Aaron told me multiple times that he likes to challenge Eurocentric narratives, which is what the 1619 Project does.

The goal of the 1619 Project is to reframe the founding narrative of the United States. When Derek described the 1619 Project, he stated, "Overall, I think it's good and it, if nothing else, has helped the conversation about the impact of and legacy of slavery still today." It would seem that Derek is correct and the topic of slavery and the year 1619 is more of a conversation now than prior to the publication of the 1619 Project. Indeed, I argue that part of the reason conservative critics have been so outspoken is because they fear the gains of the 1619 Project. Although conservative critics have achieved some legislative victories, I contend they have yet to make many major victories in classrooms as teachers have relative autonomy in their classes.

It is too early to tell the long-term effects of the 1619 Project or conservative challenges on U.S. history teachers. Change in schools and shifts in national narratives are slow, but they do occur (Fullan, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 2009). One example of this is the prevalence of multiculturalism discussions in my interviews, a recent value in U.S. education systems. The benefits of multiculturalism, however, are not universally agreed upon. Nor, for instance, is the internment of Japanese American universally viewed as a poor decision (Camicia, 2008). Therefore, I doubt the 1619 Project will ever become a completely uncontroversial topic. I suspect what is more likely is that slowly a consensus will form among U.S. history educators that will change the way many of them present the founding narrative of the United States.

My study mostly focuses on the debates taking place in the public sphere surrounding history content. The state-level laws being passed that define education standards, however, have a direct effect on the context in which these conversations take place and the schools where teachers teach. I did not specifically ask the teachers about the recent legislation in their states, and only one teacher brought it up in our conversation. Regardless of teachers' awareness of the legislation, or even if proposed legislation passes, it feeds into an environment where parents or

community members feel entitled to complain about teachers' materials or practices. Some recent legislative efforts, such as the guidance the Georgia Board of Education released in 2021, are written in vague enough language so that teachers retain some flexibility in how they make choices for their classrooms. Yet, there are additional bills which state legislators are debating while this research progressed. As these challenges continue, it remains to be seen how close they come to teachers in the classroom. If they stay at a distance, teachers might be able to continue ignoring challenges or only make small tweaks to their curriculum. Although, this might not always be the case. For instance, a Florida legislator proposed a bill permitting the installation of cameras in classrooms. The purpose of these cameras is to check on "incidents" in classrooms, meaning an "event, a circumstance, an act, or an omission that results in the abuse or neglect of a student" and not for the constant monitoring of teachers (Video Cameras in Public School, 2022, sec. 1.1). It is not a stretch of the imagination, however, to see how the potential for someone to check on a teacher's class could further dissuade them from discussing topics which are already controversial and have legislation limiting their discussion.

In addition to not closely considering the impact of the legislation directly on the teachers I interviewed, I only talked with teachers and did not view their practices in classrooms. A larger study might follow up with conversations with teachers by observing lessons in their classrooms to see how their stated values manifest in practice. This would also help to elevate student voices as they have agency in their learning. They are not simply passive receptacles of knowledge, which is sometimes overlooked in the public conversation as well. Future research might also look more closely at two elements of teacher professional development – their pre-service training and on-going professional development. Doing so could provide clearer insight into how teachers' professional identities form. Additionally, the Pulitzer Center has created a 1619

Project education network. A case study on what teachers see themselves doing in those working groups with other teachers around the country and who self-selects into them would also reveal more about the curricular change in which teachers value and participate.

To conclude, the current disputes surrounding U.S. history education have developed in the highly polarized environment of larger conversations in the United States. As Camicia (2008) points out, curricular controversy is "a focal point for the expression of deeper conflicts related to historical and contemporary contexts" (p. 304). In this case, the debate about history education is also about what the United States values and who gets to decide on those values. As a result, many teachers in my study view the concerns of conservatives surrounding the 1619 Project and teaching too much about slavery as mostly political rather than being about student learning.

One teacher I interviewed, Thomas, is personally thinking through the question of U.S. values and elevating a diversity of viewpoints. Thomas has been learning more about Thomas Jefferson as both a slaveowner and a founding father. He queries:

> And how do you wrestle with that? First of all, do you compartmentalize that he was a great leader and a great President but kind of a garbage human being? What do you do with that information? What do you do with that knowledge?

Thomas's personal struggle with how to parse the good and the bad of U.S. history is a micro version of the national conversation. The question emerges as a nation: how do we deal with the reality that the effects of slavery and racism still profoundly affect our nation today? Some people want to ignore these effects or do not believe they exist; others seek to directly acknowledge them. My study shows, however, that most teachers believe the history of slavery and the unequal treatment of Americans of color needs to be taught, and it is likely that their curricular materials reflect this belief.

As the United States once again debates its national story and who gets to tell this story, U.S. history teachers are in a unique position to influence the outcome of the disputes. It is through teachers' work that any sort of educational theory or debate becomes a reality. This work on the ground in classrooms is one important area where ideas about national narratives and the knowledge base of U.S. history are created. Although teachers work in separate classrooms in schools across the country and much of their work is done individually, collectively they have agency and can shape historical discourse. What U.S. history teachers tell students about the nation helps to build national knowledge about what the United States values. Overall, the institution of public schooling plays a profound role in the United States. What exactly that role is in supporting our nation's democracy is always going to be up to some debate as Tyack (2003) suggests. Whether schools should instill some type of civic morality in students, and what type of morality, ties back into questions of democracy, nationhood, and democratic education.

The teachers I interviewed believe they have an obligation to prepare students to be well-informed, critical-thinking citizens. Not every teacher stated this directly, but some see their work as healing the social divisions experienced today. Christopher wants his students to understand "that people are people. And that, in order to be a good person in this day and age, you have to stop treating some people like they're the other." He continues:

> You're not going to cure racism in the classroom; you're not going to cure prejudice or discrimination, but if you can get them to start treating people like they're not the other just because of how they look, that's good. And I think that's what talking about race relations throughout history helps with. That helps frame the struggles people face today.

Christopher's estimation of what he can help students accomplish in the time they have in class together is modest. Yet, this study's findings suggest that if teachers achieve their goals for

students to become engaged critical thinkers who have a basic respect for others and grasp of U.S. history, the intensity of the debates about history education today would diminish.

Appendix 1: Teacher Guide

Urban Areas *Which are also typically liberal and have majority students of color*			**Suburban/Rural Areas** *Which are also typically conservative and have plurality or majority white students*		
Name	Politics[1]	Race/Ethnicity	Name	Politics	Race/Ethnicity
		Illinois			
Paul	Center	Latino	Caleb	Left	white
Aaron	Left	Latino	Christopher	Left	white
Daniel	N/A	Latino	Matthew	Center	white
Gina[2]	Left	white	Tyler	Center	white
		Georgia			
Lindsey	Right	Latina	Michelle	Left	white
Haley	Center	white	Tracy[3]	Right	white
			Lisa	Left	white
		Florida			
Derek	Left	white	Kelly	Right	white
			Mary	Center	white
			Dustin	Right	N/A
			Jason	Left	Asian
			Megan	Center	white
			Thomas	Right	white

Notes:

1. Most teachers gave very detailed and nuanced descriptions of their personal political identities. The listed political identities which each teacher is a reduction of the complexity of their political beliefs.
2. Gina is the only teacher in an urban area whose school is majority white students.
3. Tracy is the only teacher in a suburban/rural area whose local area leans liberal and whose students are mostly students of color.
4. Student demographics and locale type (suburban, urban, rural) were taken from the National Center for Education Statistics site in December 2021 (*Search for Public Schools*, 2021).
5. Locale political leanings were taken from bestplaces.net, a website reporting on statistics of places around the United States (*Best Places to Live in the United States*, 2022).

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Questions about the Teacher

- Why did you decide to become a history teacher?
- How long have you been teaching in general? Did you have another career before you began teaching?
- How long have you been teaching at your current school?
- Can you describe the racial composition of the student body of your school?
- What is the racial composition of the social studies department you teach in?
- What classes have you taught over the course of your teaching career?

Demographic information

- Where did you get your undergrad degree? What did you major in?
- Do you have a master's degree? If so, where did you get it? What was it in?
- What race or ethnic group(s) do you identify with?
- How old are you/what age range are you in?
- How do you identify yourself politically?
- Thinking about your closest friends and family, are they largely the same or different race than you?

History Education in General

- What is the most important thing you want students to get out of your history classes?
    - Do you think your students come away with this?
- What do you see as the purpose of history education in public schools?
- What do you see as the role of civics education in our public education system?
- Do current events impact your teaching? If so, in what ways?
- Thinking about how you answered the previous few questions, how in line are your beliefs about history education with the rest of your department and school district?

Teaching the History of Slavery and Race Relations

- How do you teach the history of slavery and about race relations?
- What do you hope students come away with after lessons about the history of race relations?
- Has the way you teach about slavery and the history of racism in the United States changed in the past few years? If yes, how so? If not, why do you think it hasn't?
- In what units/what percent of units do you discuss the history of Black Americans?
- Do you try to incorporate works by Black authors or authors of color into your curriculum when you teach about the history of race relations or slavery?

The 1619 Project for Districts that adopted it

- Have you used the 1619 Project in your classroom?
- Can you describe how you use the 1619 Project in your classroom?
- Do you use the curriculum materials the Pulitzer Center provides or your own?
- Had you heard of the 1619 Project before [school district name] incorporated it into their curriculum?
- What's your understanding of the 1619 project?
- What are your thoughts about your district adopting the 1619 Project?
- What impact has the district adopting the 1619 Project had on your teaching/classroom?
- How do students respond to your teaching of the 1619 Project?

- Do you have any reservations about using the 1619 Project?
- How much do you see your personal identities and beliefs influencing how you teach the history of racism, slavery, and the 1619 Project?
- From your perspective does teaching the 1619 Project make a difference in the lives of students? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think that's the case?
- Are there any teachers against teaching the project in your district? If so, how was that handled?
- Are there any local critiques of you or your school using the 1619 Project?
- Do national commentaries about the 1619 Project or teaching about the history of race affect your classroom?

The 1619 Project for Other Schools

- Have you heard of the 1619 Project before?
- If Yes
  - What's your understanding of the 1619 project?
  - Have you used the 1619 Project in your classroom?
  - If yes, how?
    - Move to questions within school districts that adopted it
  - If not, would you consider using it?
    - Move to questions below in the "if no" category
- If No
  - How do students respond to your teaching of race relations and slavery? Does it vary by the race of the student?
  - How much do you see your personal identities and beliefs influencing how you teach the history of racism and slavery?
  - Do national commentaries about the teaching about the history of race affect your classroom?

Appendix 3: Coding Categories and Sub-Categories

1. Teacher background and beliefs
    a. Not sharing personal beliefs
    b. Personal beliefs impacting teaching materials
    c. Personal beliefs impacting teaching
    d. Using personal background to connect with students
2. General goals for students
    a. Citizenship goals
        i. Critical thinking
        ii. Knowledge of political system
        iii. Respect for others
    b. Content history goals
        i. Seeing how history affects us today
        ii. Learning from history to avoid repeating mistakes
        iii. Connecting history with student identities
        iv. Know the good and bad of U.S. history
3. Institutional support teachers receive
    a. State
    b. School district
    c. School
4. The environment in which teachers operate
    a. Descriptions of surrounding community
        i. Physical environment
        ii. Community members
    b. Descriptions of people
        i. Teacher colleagues
        ii. Parents
        iii. Students
5. Comments about racism, race relations, and slavery
    a. Racial justice has not been accomplished
    b. Comments deflecting racism
    c. Approaches to teaching
    d. Teachers' own understandings
6. Hopes for students surrounding race topics
    a. Gain empathy and respect for others
    b. Correct student misunderstandings/fill in lack of knowledge
    c. Realize race issues still affect us
    d. Gain hope for students' persona lives
    e. Inspire students to make a positive change

7. Discussions of curricular challenges in general
    a. Negative comments about conservative critics
    b. Adding in additional perspectives into history classes
    c. Vague references to history debates
8. Discussions of the 1619 Project
    a. Those who have never heard of the project
    b. Those who would not use the project
    c. Those who use the project
    d. Those in-between

Appendix 4: Teacher and School Characteristics

Teacher Characteristics

Characteristic	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Male	11	55%
Female	9	45%
Hispanic	4	20%
White	14	70%
Asian	1	5%
No Response	1	5%
Bachelor’s Degree	5	25%
Master’s Degree in Progress	5	25%
One or two master’s degree(s)	10	50%
≤ 5 years teaching	7	35%
5 - 10 years teaching	6	30%
11 - 20 years teaching	2	10%
> 20 years teaching	5	25%
Left/liberal/democratic	8	40%
Independent/likes ideas from both parties	6	30%
Right/conservative/republican/libertarian	5	25%
No Response	1	5%
20-29	7	35%
30-39	4	20%
40-49	7	35%
50-59	2	10%

Characteristics of the Schools where the Teachers Work

Characteristic	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Illinois	8	40%
Florida	5	25%
Georgia	7	35%
Urban	7	35%
Suburban	4	20%
Rural	9	45%
Majority students of color	6	30%
Plurality white students	5	25%
Majority white students	9	45%

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