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Teachers' curricular choices when teaching histories of oppressed people: Capturing the U.S. Civil Rights Movement[☆]



Katy Swalwell^{a,*}, Anthony M. Pellegrino^{b,1}, Jenice L. View^c

^a Iowa State University, 2015 Cessna Street, Ames, IA 50014, United States

^b George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Mail Stop 4B3, Fairfax, VA 22030, United States

^c George Mason University, United States

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates what choices teachers made and what rationales they offered related to the inclusion and exclusion of primary source photographs for a hypothetical unit about the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in order to better understand teachers' curricular decision-making as it relates to representing the histories of oppressed people. Elementary and secondary social studies/history teachers from three different in-service and pre-service cohorts ($n=62$) selected and discarded images from a bank of 25 famous and lesser-known photographs. Their decisions and explanations were coded for emergent themes. Findings reveal that these teachers tended to be guided by criteria both technical (how they might teach using a particular photograph) and philosophical (why they might teach about a particular photograph), with narrow definitions of what they deemed relevant and appropriate for their students. Their choices constructed a sanitized narrative of the Civil Rights Movement that largely avoided a discussion of racism.

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Introduction

Whether they must use some form of scripted lessons or have total autonomy with what and how to teach, teachers make hundreds of decisions each day about what to highlight, what to downplay, and what to avoid – decisions whose path leaves behind a wake that we call the enacted curriculum. Inevitably, these decisions are mitigated by a series of influences like testing pressures, available resources, students' interests, and teachers' own content knowledge, values, and world-views. What choices do teachers make when creating units about the history of oppressed people? What do they include and exclude from the stories they tell? What explanations do they offer for their choices? And what do these reveal about the historical narratives they are presenting to their students?

To answer these questions, this study asked pre-service and practicing social studies teachers to select and discard five images from a bank of 25 famous and lesser-known photographs in order to design a hypothetical unit about the African

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 608 852 3056.

E-mail addresses: katyswalwell@gmail.com (K. Swalwell), apelleg2@gmu.edu (A.M. Pellegrino).

¹ Tel.: +1 703 993 5253.

American Civil Rights Movement in the United States (CRM) (see [Appendix A](#) for images). The CRM is a useful topic for this study both because of its entrenched status as a prevalent topic in K-12 U.S. history classrooms and because of its emphasis on the history of racial oppression – a subject central to effective social studies ([Au, 2009](#); [McNeil, 2005](#)). Teachers selected images they believed best represented the CRM and discarded those they believed would not contribute to or even perhaps inhibit students' understanding of the CRM. Analysis of participants' choices as well as the explanations for their decisions reveal varied beliefs about how teachers should go about representing past oppression, and how they should make curricular choices about social studies content in general. As findings show, both in-service and pre-service teachers at the K-12 level tended to be guided by technical and philosophical criteria with the majority offering narrow definitions of *relevance* and *appropriateness* that ultimately constructed sanitized narratives of the Civil Rights Movement and avoided robust attention to racism and White supremacy.

Background

In the current U.S. educational climate, it is clear that teachers' curricular choices are constrained by standards and accountability pressures. Even with the advent of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which emphasizes students' research and analytical skills, teachers are largely left out of conversations about curricular development and the content they are tasked to provide to their students. Major curricular (and assessment) decisions are instead mostly made at the national and state level. Teachers are expected to teach for student success on end-of-course or other high stakes assessments, largely eschewing potent skill and knowledge development fostered by effective pedagogies. In social studies, this dynamic is perhaps exacerbated by the nature of disciplinary content, which includes topics of political and social controversy ([Cherryholmes, 2013](#); [Grant, 2008](#)) and the potential for students to develop sophisticated reasoning and research skills, which can be more challenging than other skills to teach and assess ([Barton, 2011](#); [Wineburg, 2001](#)).

Despite these pressures from outside the classroom, social studies teachers must still make practical decisions individually and in cooperative teams about what content to include/exclude, what to emphasize/deemphasize, and what means will best reach their curricular objectives ([Grant, 2008](#); [McCutcheon, 1995](#)). Standards, curriculum maps, and pacing guides certainly put pressure on teachers with regards to what content to cover and what relative levels of depth they can reach on certain topics, but teachers personally affect the curriculum at every turn ([Cornbleth, 2001](#)). While some teachers choose to simply teach the standards as presented, others opt to purposefully design their curriculum through their social and cultural interpretations of the content ([Bandura, 2001](#); [McNeil, 2005](#)). [Salinas and Castro \(2010\)](#), for example, described two Latino pre-service teachers who recognized the inability of the sanctioned curriculum to meet the needs of their students and 'openly disrupted the official social studies knowledge supported by the standard curriculum' (p. 448). And [Monte-Sano and Budano \(2013\)](#) revealed the conscious choices two novice teachers made when selecting emphasis and direction of the curriculum.

In light of the tensions that manifest between the formal and the enacted curriculum, a significant part of teacher development at various stages of teachers' careers must include attention to how they make curricular decisions and the cultural and social contexts in which they make them. Methods courses for pre-service teachers and in-service teacher professional development are two kinds of 'intentional learning opportunities (to) help teachers acquire and develop the vision, knowledge, practices, frameworks and dispositions they need to promote student learning' ([Feiman-Nemser, 2008](#), p. 697). Specifically in the study of U.S. history, these opportunities must involve representing, transforming, and attending to students' ideas about the past ([Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013](#)) while adhering to curricular guidelines and how these interact to function as relevant lessons and activities that culminate in meaningful student learning.

This project focuses on the modern Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. as the topic through which to explore how pre-service and practicing teachers make curricular choices and conceptualize the narratives they want to impart based on those choices. The opportunities for teaching about the CRM seem especially ripe at this time, given the series of 50th anniversary commemorations of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and recent Supreme Court decisions that are directly related to the CRM (for example, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 2013 decision in *Shelby County, AL v. Holder*). Despite the importance of this era in American history, textbook representations of the CRM range from limited to poor ([View, 2010](#)). In particular, civil rights teaching is typically offered through the lens of a handful of individuals and events, with little analysis of the historical context, the contemporary legacies of the movement, or the intersectionality and flow of social justice activism that preceded and followed the years typically associated with the period ([Aldridge, 2006](#); [Brown & Brown, 2010](#); [Menkart, Murray & View, 2004](#)). Nationally, the mandates to teach about the CRM lessen the farther away from the South and the smaller the African American population (Southern Poverty Law Center, p. 7). Given these circumstances, an examination of new approaches to teaching about the Civil Rights Movement seems to be a timely and complementary topic to better explore teachers' curricular decision-making with regards to the histories of oppressed people.

Theoretical frameworks

Curricular decision-making

This study was grounded in how social and cultural interpretations of content affect individual teachers' *curricular decision making* ([Feiman-Nemser, 2008](#)) with the assumption that:

The teaching of history, like all aspects of historical study, involves choice and selection: one cannot avoid choices, one cannot simply 'include more.' The question then becomes on what grounds choices are made...The criteria for choices of inclusion can themselves be made explicit and become the subject of teachers' and students' discussions (Levstik, 2000, p. 7).

It relies heavily upon McCutcheon's (1995) idea of solo deliberation as the process by which teachers negotiate ideas and values consequential to curriculum development. Solo deliberation, according to McCutcheon, 'is a form of practical reasoning with its roots in...practical theories' (p. 53), whereby teachers develop learning experiences drawn largely from their own ways of knowing in the context of what they believe to be best for their students. McCutcheon advocated explicating these deliberative processes in curricular decision-making through experiences in teacher preparation programs in which teacher candidates are given the opportunity to make decisions and reflect on their choices.

McCutcheon's work echoed that of Cornbleth (1985) who noted that effective curricular development is a result of 'attention to questions of (student and teacher) values and interests' and responsible to 'the interplay of product, process and content' (p. 42). More recently, Evans (2008) referred to this process as developing a 'pedagogic creed' which comes from making and evaluating curricular choices based in part on teacher and student beliefs and notions of relevant cultural practice. Cherryholmes (2013) furthered this notion by asserting that '(s)ocial studies education is an ongoing discourse about what to teach with an eye toward aesthetic possibilities, not ultimate knowledge' (p. 573). This study also draws upon the work of Barton (2011), Wineburg (2001), Cornbleth (2001) and Monte-Sano and Budano (2013) who noted the potential for students to develop sophisticated reasoning and research skills through teachers' cogent curricular choices.

Histories of oppressed people

This study also pays special attention to how curricular decision-making interacts with certain types of content. In particular, this project examines the choices teachers made regarding the *histories of oppressed people*. Considering Iris Marion Young's (1990) 'five faces of oppression,' the CRM is a clear example of people experiencing, fighting against, and perpetuating all forms of oppression – exploitation, cultural imperialism, violence, marginalization, and powerlessness. Whether teachers are working in schools with predominantly White and/or wealthy students, more diverse groups, or a majority students of color and/or students living in poverty, attention to these topics is crucial. Epstein (2009) argued that:

Although history teachers have an obligation to ensure that students learn the historical information required to pass state exams, they also have an obligation to teach about national history in ways that reflect the experiences, interpretations, and interactions of the nation's diverse population. (p. 125)

An increasingly diverse student body demands a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) that 'teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students' (Gay, 2000, p. 29) with intentional inclusion of content that represents a multicultural society. Though the long tradition of multicultural education has had many iterations, this project aligns with those attempts that go beyond sustaining heritage months such as Black History Month (see View, 2013) by pointing to a critical analysis of race and racism rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), which takes as normal the 'permeating thread of racism in the fabric of American life' (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 79).

And despite focusing on the African American Civil Rights Movement, this analytical frame acknowledges the need to expand 'the work on culture and race to be inclusive of more than just Black Americans' (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 69). An effective national history curriculum ought to be 'thick' enough to sustain collective action, yet 'thin' enough to provide room for the cultures of a variety of descent groups (Hollinger, 1997). In this way, the teaching and learning of national history would include the study of the different systems of ethno-racial classification used in the nation including consideration of the various constituencies empowered or disempowered by these classifications (Levstik, 2000, p. 285). This approach to studying history would 'challenge the authority that has traditionally allowed skin color and the shape of the face to exercise over culture (Hollinger, 1997, p. 569).' Yet 'there is little evidence that U.S. teachers are prepared to help students participate in the type of debate described by Hollinger,' thereby limiting the kinds of curricular choices that teachers are likely to make (Levstik, 2000, p. 285). This quantitative study is thus grounded in the idea that the curricular decisions of teachers – and especially White teachers in multiracial schools (Howard, 2006) – related to race and racism in United States history is an essential area of focus for social studies education research.

Methods

Designing the project included carefully selecting a bank of twenty-five photographs that could represent a range of possible narratives of the Civil Rights Movement related to rights for African Americans in the United States (see Appendix B). Images included those that were iconic and unfamiliar, local and remote, more recent and more historic, and candid shots as well as planned portraits. To complete their tasks, the students had access to a packet with one photograph per page. Each image included a caption that provided basic information: who appeared in the picture, when it was taken, and at what event or where it occurred. (See Appendix A for a complete list of the images.) In an effort to develop captions that were as neutral as possible, the language of these captions was field-tested with several doctoral students during the design process (Creswell, 2008).

The participants' task was to select five photos, discard five photos, and to identify which photos were most challenging or easiest to discard as they planned for a hypothetical CRM unit. Teachers were encouraged to make their own determinations of what was important to include or exclude and to offer rationales for their choices. The photos thus served as the basis for a kind of photo-interviewing or photo elicitation method of data collection (Hurworth, 2004), an approach that can evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words. These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information (Harper, 2002, p. 13).

In other words, the photographs helped to elicit teachers' historical narratives and 'practical reasoning' (McCutcheon, 1995, p. 53) in ways that would have been difficult to do in direct interviews. This approach is very similar to work done by Foster, Hoge and Rosch (1999) in which students interpreted photographs along with semi-structured interviews in order to gauge their historical understanding. Rather than evaluating their historical accuracy or ability to engage in some kind of historical thinking, this exercise of 'thinking aloud' (Foster et al., 1999, p. 179) generated data that allowed us to identify what curricular choices teachers made and revealed their justifications for doing so – their curricular choices in relation to historical narratives. Though this was a qualitative study, the numerical data generated by the participants' decisions was also valuable in noting trends and patterns.

In order to determine if there were differences between novice and more experienced teachers at the elementary and secondary levels, data was collected from three different cohorts of social studies/history teachers ($n=62$): 22 elementary pre-service teachers, 17 pre-service secondary social studies teachers in a mid-Atlantic university, and 23 in-service K-12 teachers participating in a U.S. Department of Education Teaching American History (TAH) grant in the deep South (21 secondary and two elementary).² (See Table 1.) The pre-service teachers were predominantly White females in their early 20s. The practicing teachers tended to be older and more racially/ethnically diverse with more males.

The in-service teachers (both secondary and elementary) had volunteered to participate in five monthly daylong TAH workshops, all of which focused on the connections between their state and U.S. history. The professional development workshops explicitly examined issues of race and class beginning with the colonial period of the U.S. At the time that the teachers engaged in this curriculum design activity, they had received an introductory lecture on the ways in which their state had contributed political, intellectual and strategic grounding for the national modern Civil Rights Movement. They then had 45 min to examine photos, complete the selection sheet (see Appendix B), and share their choices with one another.

The pre-service teachers made their selections under different circumstances. The secondary pre-service teachers individually examined the packet during a methods course meeting, made their selections, wrote brief explanations for their decisions, and then participated in a 30-min class discussion about their choices in which all candidates shared at least one image they selected or discarded. The elementary pre-service teachers examined the packet, made their selections, and wrote their explanations as part of a homework assignment. They also participated in a class discussion about their choices during the class session when their homework was due. Participants' written reflections were collected, and the class discussions recorded and transcribed (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2002).

Data analysis/coding

The quantitative data from each cohort separately was analyzed first by computing the frequency of image selection and rejection for each photograph (see Tables 2 and 3). Because the selection and rejection decisions were quite similar among the three cohorts, the numerical data of all the cohorts was combined to determine general trends, including the levels of consensus about a photograph in relation to how often a participant selected or discarded it. *Attention frequency* indicated the number of times a photograph was selected (S) or discarded (D) divided by the number of participants (P) (S/P or D/P). *Selection frequency* indicated the difference between the number of times an image was selected and discarded, divided by the sum of the number of times it was selected and discarded ($S-D/S+D$). In addition, the frequency of selecting or discarding a photograph from two time periods (between 1950 and 1975, and before 1950 and after 1975) was calculated by dividing the total number of times an image was selected (S) or discarded (D) by the total number of photos from that era (T) (S/T or D/T). Analysis of both combined and disaggregated data helped identify emerging patterns related to participants' decisions about which images to include and exclude (Maxwell, 2013).

Next, a textual analysis of participants' reasons for selecting or rejecting images found in their written reflections and the transcripts of class conversations about the assignment was conducted. Often, participants offered more than one reason for a decision. Each reason was identified and listed as a potential code. Once all of the reflections and transcripts were examined, the codes were collapsed into twelve themes, four of which related to reasons for discarding (is irrelevant, is too graphic, is overly familiar, is not provocative enough) and eight which related to selecting (provides context, is emotionally impactful,

² Because there were only two elementary teachers from the TAH course who volunteered to participate, we have not disaggregated the in-service teachers' data in the numerical findings reported below, but do identify them when discussing rationales. Though our findings show rather small differences among them, research should include greater attention to potential differences among in-service and pre-service K-12 teachers' curricular decision-making.

Table 1
Demographics of participants.

| | In-service, N=23 | Secondary pre-service, N=17 | Elementary pre-service, N=22 |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Male | 10 (43%) | 5 (29%) | 3 (14%) |
| White | 17 (74%) | 16 (94%) | 18 (82%) |
| Over 30 | 17 (74%) | 6 (35%) | 3 (14%) |
| History/SS major | 15 (65%) | 13 (76%) | N/A |
| Elementary | 2 (1%) | N/A | N/A |

Table 2
Frequency of discarded images across cohorts.

| Frequency of discarding | Pre-service elementary | Pre-service secondary | In-service |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Highest | Gordon (56%) | President Obama (50%) | DC March (35%) |
| ↑ | Lynching (41%) | Gordon (35%) | PE County (35%) |
| | Dolls (27%) | PE County (29%) | TN Street (30%) |
| | Dogs (18%) | Robinson (29%) | Gordon (22%) |
| | GCFM (18%) | MLK & Girls (24%) | President Obama (22%) |
| | MLK & Girls (18%) | TN Street (24%) | Auction House (17%) |
| | President Obama (18%) | Dolls (18%) | Dogs (17%) |
| | VA Sit-in (18%) | Funeral (18%) | Robinson (17%) |
| | Auction House (14%) | Auction House (12%) | VA Sit-in (17%) |
| | Flag Attack (14%) | Meredith (12%) | Eckford (13%) |
| | PE County (14%) | GCFM (6%) | Funeral (13%) |
| | Hose (10%) | Hose (6%) | MLK & Girls (13%) |
| | Meredith (10%) | | AL Arrest (9%) |
| | TN Street (10%) | | Car Sign (9%) |
| | Beach (5%) | | Dolls (9%) |
| | Car Sign (5%) | | Flag Attack (9%) |
| | I Am A Man (5%) | | Lynching (9%) |
| | Robinson (5%) | | Meredith (9%) |
| | | | Beach (4%) |
| | | | Bridges (4%) |
| | | | GCFM (4%) |
| | | Hose (4%) | |
| | | I Am A Man (4%) | |
| | | Shakes (4%) | |
| Lowest | | | |
| ↓ | Not discarded | Bridges | AL Arrest |
| | | DC March | Beach |
| | | Eckford | Bridges |
| | | Funeral | DC March |
| | | Shakes | Dogs |
| | | VA Picket | Eckford |
| | | | Flag Attack |
| | | | I Am A Man |
| | | | Shakes |
| | | | VA Picket |
| | | VA Sit-in | |

Table 3
Average number of times participants selected or discarded images based upon time period.

| | Average of times each picture was selected | Average of times each picture was discarded |
|---|--|---|
| Photos taken before 1950 and after 1975 | 12.8 (64/5) | 22.6 (113/5) |
| Photos taken between 1950 and 1975 | 10.25 (205/20) | 11.75 (235/20) |

builds a timeline, celebrates progress, highlights pivotal figure/event, makes curricular connections, exhibits character traits, relates to students, tells a story, permits pedagogies, inspires youth action).

The codes were then re-applied across the data from each cohort of participants. As patterns emerged, the extent to which race, gender, subject, teaching experience, age, or other factors was examined to look for correlation with image choices. In particular, this was done to identify whether there were significant differences between the choices of elementary and secondary

teachers, as well as between pre- and in-service teachers, given differences in their depth of historical content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and curriculum mandates. There were only slight differences between the choices and rationales of elementary and secondary teachers, however, and little evidence to lend credence to the hypothesis that the in-service and pre-service teachers would make difference choices or construct different narratives. This may be related to the limited sample size. The sample population was also not large enough to make any claims about differences along the lines of race, age, or gender.

Findings

Discarded images

The most commonly discarded photograph among all participants was the image of Gordon, a man sitting with his back towards the camera to reveal deep physical scars incurred from years of enslavement. Fifty-three percent of all participants chose to discard this image; it was the first most commonly discarded photograph among elementary pre-service teachers, the second among secondary pre-service, and the fifth most common among in-service teachers (see [Table 2](#)). Another commonly discarded image was a photograph from Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark's 1939 research assessing Black children's preference for White dolls; 37% of all participants discarded this image. It was the third most discarded image among pre-service elementary teachers, tied for fifth most discarded image among pre-service secondary teachers, and tied with five other images as the sixth most discarded image for in-service teachers. Another showed President Obama at a lectern; 35% of all participants discarded it. This was tied with four other images for fourth most commonly discarded image for pre-service elementary teachers, was the most frequently discarded image among pre-service secondary teachers, and was tied for third most frequently discarded image among in-service teachers.

When disaggregating among the three cohorts of teachers, two images stood out as uniquely discarded. Though none of the pre-service teacher groups discarded the photograph of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, it was tied for most frequently discarded among the in-service teachers. And though more elementary teachers discarded the photograph of a crowd standing under the body of a lynched man than selected it, the same was not true for secondary pre-service and in-service teachers. Lastly, participants were nearly twice as likely to discard a photograph taken before 1950 or after 1975 than if it had been taken between those years (see [Table 3](#)).


The most common reasons that participants gave in their written reflections for discarding photographs were that the images were irrelevant (71% of all participants applied this reasoning), too graphic (35%), overly familiar (31%), or not provocative enough (18%). Many teachers had multiple reasons for selecting or discarding a photograph, and most photographs elicited multiple reasons across participants. For instance, the image of President Obama was 'not in the scope of the CRM' for an in-service secondary teacher while another discarded it because her students are 'too exposed to his image' so it 'loses effect.' A few photographs, however, generated consensus across cohorts for why they should be discarded – namely because they were not provocative enough. For example, one pre-service elementary teacher described a picture of three NAACP leaders meeting in Prince Edward County as not provocative enough in that it 'could just as well depict three men discussing a horse race or the news of the day' while in-service teachers described it as 'not interesting,' 'does not show any struggling,' and 'did not tell enough of a story.' Pre-service secondary teachers explained that it 'did not have a Wow factor' and said that 'there was nothing compelling about this photo – just three guys conversing.'

The elementary teachers most frequently employed the 'too graphic' justification for discarding images with any sort of violence depicted. Said one pre-service elementary teacher of Gordon's photograph, 'This picture was too painful for me to look at and it made me feel sick to my stomach. If I have issues handling the picture, I thought it was too mature to show to second graders.' In describing why she discarded the images of Gordon, the fire hoses turning on protestors, and the dogs attacking children, another said, 'These were the easiest for me to discard because I felt that they depicted a clear dislike, hate, and extreme violence compared to the other photographs.' One in-service elementary teacher explained that the image of the lynching was 'easy to discard because [it] depicts violence', noting 'I have to consider the grade level I teach.' Secondary teachers were less likely to use the graphic nature of an image as the reason to discard it, but often discarded it anyway by deeming it unrelated to the unit because of when the photograph was taken: 'The topic is civil rights not slavery,' remarked one in-service secondary teacher in relation to the image of Gordon. 'It's not from the Civil Rights era,' said another of the lynching picture.

Selected images

The most commonly selected image was Ruby Bridges walking down her school steps surrounded by bodyguards; 53% of all participants selected this photograph. It was the first or second most commonly selected photograph among each cohort. Other popular images included the shakes being poured on students' heads at a Greensboro lunch counter sit-in; 40% of all participants selected it. It was the second most selected image among pre-service elementary teachers, tied for fifth with four other images selected by pre-service secondary teachers, and was the most commonly selected image among in-service teachers. Another commonly selected image was the White anti-desegregation protesters shouting at Elizabeth Eckford as she walked to a bus stop near Little Rock's Central High School; 31% of all participants chose this image. It was the fifth most selected image among pre-service elementary teachers, tied with three other photos for the third most selected among pre-service secondary teachers, and tied for second among in-service teachers. The Pulitzer-prize winning photograph of a

Table 4
Frequency of selected images across cohorts.

| Frequency of selection | Pre-service elementary | Pre-service secondary | In-service | |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| Highest  Lowest | Bridges (82%) | Bridges (41%) | Shakes (44%) | |
| | Shakes (56%) | Flag Attack (41%) | Bridges (35%) | |
| | President Obama (41%) | DC March (35%) | Eckford (35%) | |
| | DC March (36%) | I Am A Man (29%) | Auction house (30%) | |
| | Eckford (32%) | Auction house (24%) | Gordon (30%) | |
| | Flag Attack (27%) | Beach (24%) | President Obama (30%) | |
| | Robinson (27%) | Eckford (24%) | Dogs (26%) | |
| | Hose (23%) | Lynching (24%) | Hose (26%) | |
| | Beach (18%) | Shakes (18%) | Lynching (26%) | |
| | I Am A Man (18%) | Car Sign (18%) | Dolls (22%) | |
| | MLK & Girls (18%) | Dolls (18%) | Flag Attack (22%) | |
| | Auction House (14%) | Robinson (18%) | Meredith (22%) | |
| | Car Sign (14%) | Gordon (18%) | VA Picket (22%) | |
| | VA Sit-in (14%) | Dogs (12%) | Robinson (18%) | |
| | Dogs (10%) | Funeral (6%) | Car Sign (13%) | |
| | Dolls (10%) | President Obama (6%) | DC March (13%) | |
| | Funeral (10%) | | AL Arrest (9%) | |
| | Gordon (10%) | | I Am A Man (9%) | |
| | AL Arrest (5%) | | GCFM (4%) | |
| | Lynching (5%) | | TN Street (4%) | |
| | Meredith (5%) | | | |
| | TN street (5%) | | | |
| | VA Picket (5%) | | | |
| | Not selected | GCFM PE County | AL Arrest GCFM Hose Meredith MLK & Girls PE County TN Street VA Picket VA Sit-in | Funeral MLK & Girls PE County VA Sit-in |

White man using an American flag to attack a Black man in Boston was selected by 29% of all participants. It tied for sixth among pre-service elementary teachers, tied for first among pre-service secondary teachers, and tied with three other images for fifth most selected by in-service teachers. President Obama at a lectern earned 27% of all participants' votes; it was the third most selected by pre-service elementary, tied for the least most commonly selected among pre-service secondary, and tied for third with two other images among in-service teachers. Lastly, 27% of all participants opted to include a view of the crowd at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This was the fourth most commonly selected photo among pre-service elementary teachers, the second most commonly selected photo among pre-service secondary teachers, and tied for seventh most commonly selected photo among in-service teachers (see Table 4). The unique image in this category was the photograph of President Obama; while more pre-service elementary and in-service teachers selected it than discarded it, the opposite was true of pre-service secondary teachers.

Throughout their responses, participants' primary expressed reason for including an image was that it provided important context to understanding the CRM: the dangers facing African Americans and their allies (57% of all participants applied this reasoning), examples of daily life during segregation (34%), general historical background explaining segregation (20%), and insight into the psychology of Black and White Americans in this era (18%). Nearly a third of participants noted a need for the photograph to be emotionally impactful (39%), fit some sort of timeline of CRM events they wanted to highlight (37%), celebrate the successes of and progress since the CRM (36%), focus on a particularly pivotal event or figure (34%), make connections to other curricular materials like children's books or films (31%), and illustrate a character trait they want to develop in their students like resilience or commitment to getting an education (27%). Fewer identified a need for an image to be relatable to their students' age group or race (20%), include some photographic element that tells a story (20%), offer the possibility of an engaging pedagogical choice like discussion or debate (20%), and inspire youth involvement in current human rights issues (15%).

Just as with the discarded images, most teachers gave multiple reasons for selecting an image and most images generated multiple justifications for inclusions. Comments about the image of Ruby Bridges highlights this variety. One in-service secondary teacher said that the picture represents 'the importance, emotion, and danger of what it was like to desegregate schools.' An in-service elementary teacher found the image relatable to her students: 'The theme I wanted to show is 'Youth in

the Movement;’ I want to show my students how people their age participated in the Movement.’ I want these young people to see that they, too, can make a difference. Yet another secondary in-service teacher said, ‘I want to show a progression of race relations in this country.’ Reasons that pre-service secondary teachers gave included its ‘shock value,’ the fact that students ‘could relate,’ and ‘the juxtaposition of the innocence of the little girl with the need for bodyguards.’ Elementary pre-service teachers’ reasons included that the photo shows a person ‘at a relatable age and situation to kids in class’, represented ‘a key national event in the movement,’ ‘depicts how serious the situation was and how life used to be’ and ‘the basic human rights that the CRM was fighting for,’ shows how ‘many different ages stepped up in order to fight for their rights,’ and highlights an ‘historical figure in an educational setting.’

Though few participants explicitly noticed the chronological connection, the majority of selected pictures were taken between 1950 and 1975. Across all three cohorts, teachers who chose pictures outside of that time period offered two types of reasons. The first was to focus on what they perceived as a positive, steady progression towards an expansion of rights. Said one in-service secondary teacher: ‘[The photograph of the auction house] illustrates the process of change in the movement beginning with slavery and finishing with the election of Obama. [It shows] ‘how far we have come’ – this gives the students a vision of the change.’ Another said, ‘[The auction house pictures] shows a progression in a way from being property to integrating to acceptance.’ The other type of explanation seemed more critical in nature and reluctant to present a celebratory timeline of events. Said one in-service secondary teacher in her explanation of why she chose the image of Gordon, ‘the photos will show the sorry and hurt that had to be endured by generations.’ Another explained his overall philosophy for choosing photographs: ‘The themes that I would present are the magnitude of the Civil Rights movement both in size, fear and conflict, the legal cruelty and inhumane treatment of black people in this country, and the black people’s quest for basic human rights that we all take for granted as white American citizens.’

Consensus & disagreement

Overall, the photographs that provoked the most attention from participants were the images of Ruby Bridges, Gordon, and President Obama. In other words, these were the images that participants discarded or selected most frequently. These are the photographs that are represented as furthest along the *x*-axis in Fig. 1 (see Fig. 1). Ruby Bridges’ photograph represents a general consensus of *inclusion*: of the 62 participants, 33 included the image of Ruby Bridges and 10 discarded it (only one of whom did so ‘easily’). In response to the image of Gordon and his scarred back, there was less agreement but still a general sense that it should be *excluded*: 34 participants chose to discard it (11 struggled to make the decision) and 12 included it. The photograph of President Obama indicated the most *disagreement* among participants: 17 elected to include it while 22 chose to discard it (six reported struggling with that decision).

The three photographs that generated the most consensus with regards to image selection (those closest to 1 on the *y*-axis in Fig. 1) included the photos of Ruby Bridges, the Greensboro sit-in, and Elizabeth Eckford. These pictures met multiple criteria participants expressed in their rationales: the images depicted young people doing ‘normal’ activities like going to school or sitting at a lunch counter, had an emotional impact without being too violent, and showed some kind of action happening in which African Americans were responding with inspiring courage and non-violence. When justifying their decision to include the sit-in image, for example, one in-service secondary teacher said, ‘I wanted to pick photographs that would draw in the students; they had to be attention grabbers and lead to further discussions.’ Another explained that the photo ‘shows the character of people involved in the movement and the extreme hatred they faced and overcame.’

Those photographs that showed most consensus about discarding (those closest to -1 on the *y*-axis in Fig. 1), included an image of the NAACP meeting in Virginia, the street in front of a newly desegregated school in Tennessee, and a march led by the Grenada County Freedom Movement (GCFM). Participants universally declared these images to be boring or confusing. Said one pre-service secondary teacher in relation to the NAACP meeting photograph, ‘When I saw this image I had no response and to be honest do not know what was done at the meeting.’ Another remarked, ‘While the people and the group may be important, there is no ‘event’ occurring in this picture.’ In response to the image of the Tennessee street scene, one pre-service elementary teacher said, ‘It is not clear about what is happening. They could be waiting for a Christmas parade for all we know. It doesn’t tell enough of a story.’ Lastly, the photographs that generated the most dissent (those closest to the *x*-axis in Fig. 1) included President Obama, the March on Washington, and Jackie Robinson. The photographs were primarily supported for highlighting famous figures who represent progress (‘[A picture of Obama] highlights the progress that has been made’) and criticized for being overly familiar (‘[A picture of Obama] is something students see daily.’).

Cohort trends

When disaggregated by cohort, other trends emerged in terms of which images participants selected and discarded. Elementary preservice teachers’ most commonly selected photograph was Ruby Bridges (17/22) and their most commonly discarded photograph depicted the scars on Gordon’s back (11/22). In their written reflections, the elementary pre-service teachers’ criteria for inclusion focused most on whether an image was relatable to their students or connected to other curricular resources while their criteria for exclusion focused on the level of violence depicted in the photograph. They were also more likely than the other participants to focus on photographs from 1950 to 1975. As one admitted, ‘looking at these photographs has made me realize that I haven’t spent a lot of time considering civil rights events before or after the mid-late 1960s.’

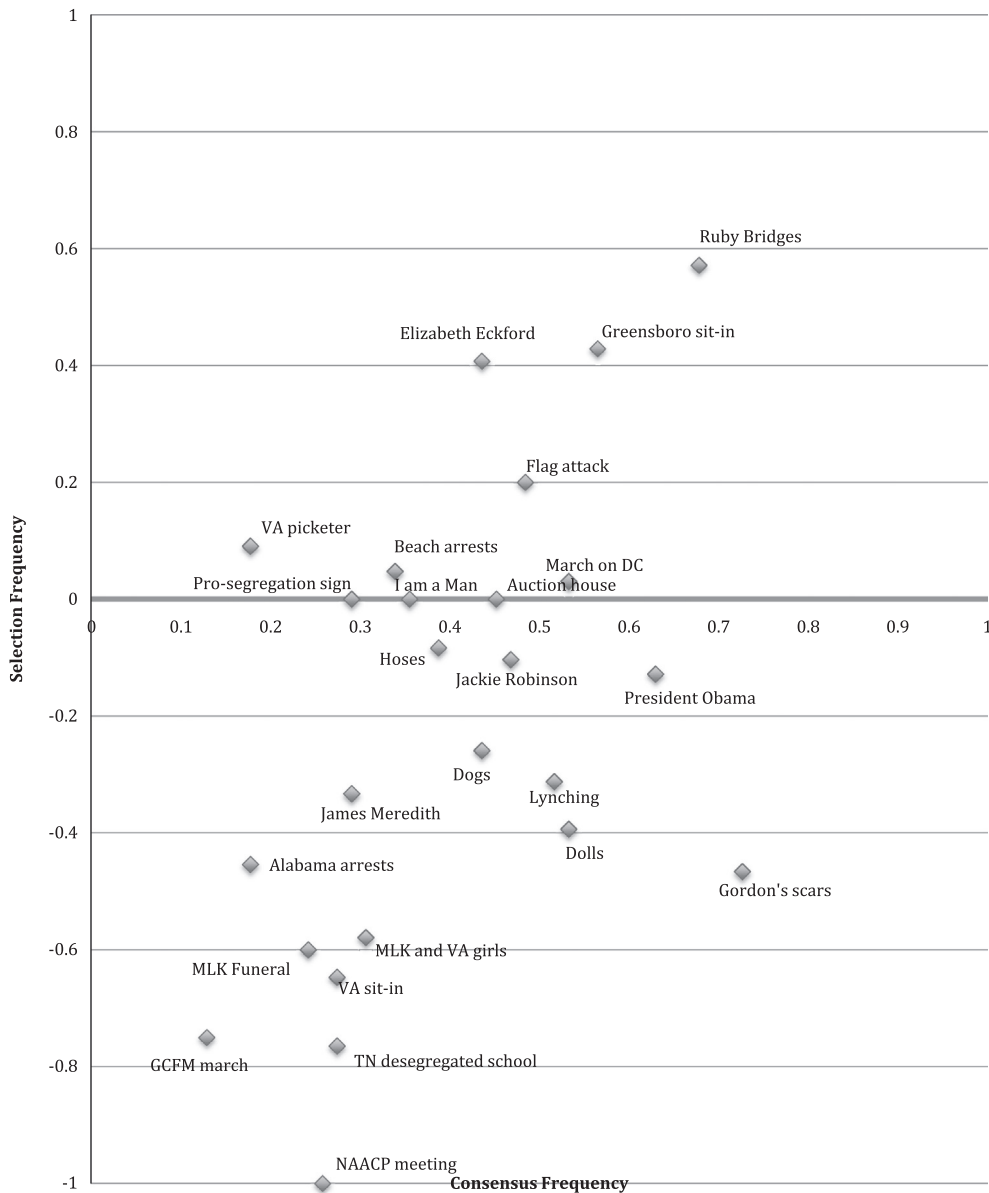


Fig. 1. Consensus about an image related to its frequency of selection.

The secondary pre-service teachers, on the other hand, were primarily concerned with whether or not the photograph had emotional impact that would help students understand the historical context. The most commonly selected picture for this cohort was tied between Ruby Bridges (7/17) and the White man attacking the Black man with an American flag (7/17). Their most commonly discarded picture was that of President Obama (7/17).

The in-service teachers (the majority of whom were secondary teachers) selected the Greensboro sit-in students more frequently than any other image (10/23). Their most frequently discarded images included the panoramic view of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (8/23) and the picture of Oliver Hill, Roy Wilkins, and Reverend Francis L. Griffin attending an NAACP gathering in Prince Edward County, Virginia (9/23). The in-service teachers were also concerned with context as well as with whether their students would be bored, so avoided images that were overly familiar and leaned towards more gripping and unfamiliar images of important events. The in-service teachers were most likely to demonstrate an interest in images from before 1950 or after 1975, and the secondary teachers within this group showed more of a willingness to include more graphic or violent images than the pre-service teachers at either level (e.g., the photograph of a lynching) (Table 5).

Table 5
Most provocative photographs disaggregated by participant cohort.

| | All participants, N=62 | In-service, N=23 | Secondary pre-service, N=17 | Elementary pre-service, N=22 |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Selected <i>Ruby Bridges</i> | 33 (53%) | 8 (35%) | 7 (41%) | 18 (82%) |
| Discarded <i>Gordon</i> | 33 (53%) | 5 (22%) | 9 (53%) | 17 (77%) |
| Selected <i>President Obama</i> | 17 (27%) | 7 (30%) | 1 (1%) | 9 (41%) |
| Discarded <i>President Obama</i> | 22 (36%) | 5 (22%) | 11 (65%) | 6 (27%) |

Discussion

Explanations for curricular decisions

Technical logic

We found two mechanisms upon which participants based their curricular decision-making. The first was *technical* in nature, oriented around participants' thinking about *how to teach*. When employing this logic, teachers asked whether or not a photograph would be practical to use. Would it 'hook' students and open up possibilities for engaging pedagogic practices like classroom debate or discussion? For the pre-service and in-service elementary teachers, this concern was expressed through their desire that a photo be relatable to their students (most often interpreted as showing a young person in the picture doing 'typical' kinds of daily activities). For the secondary in-service and pre-service teachers, the concern was more that an image show something new and compelling; they did not want to lose their adolescent students with dull images or images by spending time on images they had already seen. With regards to the photograph of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, for example, one secondary teacher said that she 'wanted to get away from the same ole [sic] images that are related to the CRM.' Another rejected the image because 'it is overwhelmingly well-known [and] because there are better pics [sic] of the event.' All groups of participants expressed the need for a photograph that tells some kind of story and paid attention to photographic elements that would intrigue students. Other technical considerations included the realistic logistics of the classroom – would a picture connect with other supplemental materials or standards that would be covered on a state exam? This was more of a concern for the pre-service elementary teachers who more frequently mentioned other books or films that could be connected with a photograph and how it would meet a state standard for which their students may be tested.

Philosophical rationales

In addition to this technical perspective, participants expressed another way of thinking about curricular choice: Is a particular photograph meaningful to include? It indicates a more *philosophical* explanatory mechanism and relates to thinking more about *what to teach* than how to teach it. What message does an image convey that a teacher might want his or her students to internalize? This issue of 'what to teach' most often related to whether or not a participant deemed an image to be *relevant* or *appropriate*.

Relevance

Participants typically interpreted relevance simply as when a picture was taken. If it was taken between 1950 and 1975, then it 'happened during the CRM' as one teacher put it. The images depicting people or events from before 1950 proved to be especially problematic like the picture of escaped slave Gordon displaying the scars on his back and other images from the 19th century like a slave auction house. This disconnection of slavery or a history of oppression against Black people and the Civil Rights Movement (or more modern racism) often occurred without any trace of irony. According to one of the pre-service elementary teachers, for example,

The three photographs which were the easiest to discard were photographs that dealt with slavery (slave auction house and slave with whip marks on his back) and the photograph of the lynching. In teaching about the Civil Rights movement, I want students to be more focused on the racism that the movement sought to overcome (established through laws such as Jim Crow, or socially accepted/understood) rather than slavery.

This strict chronological boundary suggests a silo-ization of social studies instruction that has trained students to think of history in units of decades rather than in over-arching themes or narrative arcs. In this instance, the participant either does not see Jim Crow laws or mainstream racism as connected to slavery or does not feel it appropriate to link those ideas for her students. This despite the fact that many former enslaved people were alive when Jim Crow laws were passed and when mass civil rights protests began, not to mention that the fundamental purpose of Jim Crow laws was to resist equal rights for African Americans post-emancipation.

Appropriateness

Participants' understanding of what to teach was not restricted to whether or not a picture was relevant. They also expressed great concern about whether a photograph was too graphic, not graphic enough, or just right – a kind of Goldilocks Law of Appropriateness. Students most often deemed images 'age appropriate' if they elicited emotional impact with a

PG-rated level of violence or graphic imagery. This was especially true for the in-service and pre-service elementary teachers whose explanations of their choice of Ruby Bridges and rejection of the scars on Gordon's back indicate a desire to show an image that was relatable to young children with some emotional impact but not graphic enough that students would be upset or shocked. With regards to the picture of White men dumping shakes on protestors sitting in at a lunch counter, one pre-service elementary teacher remarked, 'I wanted to show some form of violent action without really scaring the kindergartners. I felt this was a great way to bring in the violent side to everything.'

Photographs were also deemed 'appropriate' when they demonstrated African Americans (and a few Whites) acting in admirable ways with character traits that the participants wanted to model for their students such as bravery, perseverance, or non-violence. Noticeably absent from most participants' explanations was attention to or discussion of what it was that African Americans were up against: entrenched institutional and interpersonal racism and White supremacy, often enforced by extralegal violence. When selecting an iconic image like that of Elizabeth Eckford being shouted at by a White woman, for example, participants invariably explained the picture would be helpful in illuminating the courage and strength African Americans demonstrated through non-violence. Very few participants remarked on the ways in which a photograph like this could shed light on the massive White resistance to school desegregation. If they did address Whiteness, they were much more likely to choose photographs because they depicted White allies of the Civil Rights Movement. Said one, 'In a couple of the photos, it shows protestors who varied from Caucasian to African American. This would help show how this was not a 'blacks versus whites [sic]' movement and that there were many non-blacks [sic] that supported the cause.' This was not true for all participants, however. One in-service elementary teacher summarized her reasoning for her bundle of choices, 'In each of these images, the African American individuals are peacefully attempting to get equality while the white individuals are using violence, or the threat of violence, to try to stop this from happening.' Lastly, very few participants ever mentioned place in their explanations, despite the purposeful inclusion of images from nearby locations that could resonate with students for their local connections.

Historical narratives

For those participants who focused most heavily on the 'how' of teaching, any clear historical narrative was conspicuously absent from their curricular decision-making. Certainly, it is important to consider external constraints and to think about the practical logistics of teaching and issues of developmental readiness for concepts as complex and troubling as race relations.³ Some participants even commented explicitly about struggling to balance logistical and development concerns with their philosophical commitments. For example, one elementary pre-service teacher reflected:

I was rather surprised and upset at myself for playing it safe and picking the not as violent pictures. I'm a firm believer in that we should teach children about even the hard things to discuss and not hide the real world from them. At the same time, having spent time with the class, and talking to some fourth graders about the Civil War yesterday, it is clear that many of these pictures would go over their head, be too violent, or involve a lot more explaining than would be beneficial.

Many of the teachers who emphasized the need for a picture that could hook their students were doing so for reasons beyond simple classroom management. Emotional connections and deeper critical thinking skills were clearly important technical considerations when including (or discarding) pictures. Another elementary pre-service teacher explained it thusly:

I viewed the photos as a tool to invoke emotion and the other senses, which may not be invoked by purely reading a textbook accounting of the events. The photos would be used to augment the discussion and lessons and used to achieve a higher level of thinking and discussion around the civil rights movement.

Not all participants were quite as strategic. One teacher explained her inclusion of the Ruby Bridges photograph because 'it was cute as a button.' Said another, 'The story of Ruby Bridges is famous. Many children books are written about her. Perhaps I could read one to my class, and then show the kids this real-life picture of her.' A singular focus on using an image like the Ruby Bridges photograph simply because it is 'cute,' 'famous,' or ties in with other available classroom resources underscores the level to which some teachers (especially at the elementary level) depend upon standards and district – provided resources to guide their curricular decision-making – and even their understanding of history.

Ultimately, the ways in which most participants interpreted relevance and appropriateness constructed a narrative of the Civil Rights Movement that is primarily celebratory in nature (Barton, 2011; Larson & Kepier, 2011), representing it as a social movement that is finished after having achieved victory. Only a handful of participants addressed issues of racism or inequality today, and fewer still intended to focus on the historical institutional and interpersonal roots of oppression that led to White supremacy and resistance to civil rights. Instead, participants primarily emphasized progress and celebrating people who overcame dangerous situations. Said one of the pre-service elementary teachers,

³ We would argue that these topics are still teachable with young children, but in ways very different than with older students.

I want them to realize that the world was a very different place just a few decades ago and that it was the tireless, shameless efforts of brave men and women – who fought for the simple freedoms that we think of as basic human freedoms today – that got us to the country of equality and opportunity that we now live in.

An in-service teacher explained in the decision to end the unit with the picture of President Obama, 'I want to show my students that regardless of race, we can achieve great things.' Overall, the majority of teachers opted for a rather sanitized account of events in a narrow period of time, perhaps to avoid topics that may be controversial, painful, or ambiguous.

Within the framework of CRT, this as an unconscious example of what Hayes and Juárez (2012) define as 'White racial domination' – when 'individuals and groups have and make choices to support rather than to challenge White supremacy (p. 1).' There were, of course, a handful of participants whose narratives were more complex and nuanced. Said one in-service elementary teacher,

I actually think students as young as second or third grade are sufficiently mature to confront issues of race and the history of race relations in the United States in a sensible fashion, without glossing over the uglier aspects of the time, or overly simplifying the many dimensions of the problem as it has festered between the end of the Civil War and the present day.

A secondary teacher similarly emphasized the need for a CRM unit to help students 'understand of the conditions that necessitated the CRM'. And an in-service teacher explained their (comparatively unusual decision) to include the picture of White men posting a pro-segregation sign on their car as important because 'it illustrates that some Whites may not have been violent but were segregationists nonetheless,' which 'invites analysis of psychological and sociological subtleties.' More research about what drives these teachers, how they generated these narratives and justifications, and how they consciously commit to weaving them into their teaching is an important next step in researching the curricular decision-making related to the histories of oppressed people. In addition, more research with larger samples is needed to understand the distinctions that may exist between in-service and pre-service teachers as well as elementary and secondary, and among demographic characteristics like age, race, and years of experience. And, finally, better understanding of the extent to which this project as a teacher development opportunity impacted participants' future curricular decisions would benefit teacher education and professional development scholarship.

Implications

Regardless of their positionality as pre-service, in-service, elementary or secondary educators, many of these teachers struggled to bring a critical or sophisticated analytical lens to curriculum design as it related to historical content addressing racial oppression in the United States. This has several implications for history teacher education and professional development. First, there simply need to be *more* opportunities for history education and professional development. The lack of critical analysis is likely not because teachers are incapable of such a skill. Unfortunately, many teachers have had few opportunities to focus on developing their historical teaching skills and identifying ways to overcome obstacles like high-stakes testing pressure and parental pushback; this exercise was the first time anyone had asked our students to make these kinds of choices and explain them. The pre-service elementary students had one broad social studies methods course (combined with fine arts methods) at the end of their program and no required content courses, the secondary history education students had only two methods courses, and the pre-service teachers reported few professional development opportunities beyond attention to math or literacy. Notably, the in-service teachers often had little historical content knowledge as they were often hired for their athletic coaching expertise rather than any particular passion for or background in history. These teachers also practiced in a state that had only recently changed its state history exam to include more elements of historical thinking; the prior state test had been an accumulation of names and dates that students memorized with a passing rate of 90% to offset the state's poor profile with language arts and math scores. To bring a critical thinking lens to the task would require a personal or professional impulse to do so, the experience to construct engaging curricular units, and a reward system that encourages teachers to be creative and critical.

More opportunities to grapple with the kinds of tensions, challenges, and questions that accompany the teaching of any history – but particularly those histories related to oppression – is necessary for these teachers to rise to the challenge. This includes more robust requirements for history content knowledge at the pre-service elementary level (it is hard to make sophisticated curricular decisions about a topic you know little about), and more focused attention on curricular decision-making in secondary methods courses. In-service teachers often have even fewer opportunities for professional development. The in-service teachers were participants in a U.S. Department of Education Teaching American History grant – money that has now disappeared from the professional development landscape. Funding for professional development and other forms of support ought to be more widely available to K-12 in-service and pre-service teachers.

Of course, this heightened exposure to history content and methods must be rooted in multiple historical narratives – not simply dominant narratives that may obscure or deny oppression. Reading interpretations of events from a range of historians and primary sources that highlight the voices of oppressed are essential, as is attention to the foundational concept of oppression – what it is, why it is a problem, how people have reproduced it, and how people have fought against it. Funding streams for this kind of high quality continued history education are few and far between, forcing the most motivated to seek out free resources like the Zinn Education Project or piece together their own professional development through conferences like the annual National Council of Social Studies meeting. In order to help teachers challenge

dominant narratives about the past and include classroom practices that promote social justice, the nature of professional development opportunities must go beyond content and explicitly attend to the curricular decisions teachers make. Teachers need opportunities to reflect upon their decisions, compare them to others, and to justify these decisions within the guidelines of a philosophical compass (what Evans (2008) calls a ‘pedagogic creed’) that orients their professional judgments – they need to be aware that their choices construct a narrative, and must be confident that their narrative holds up under critique. Teacher educators should be particularly careful to encourage teachers to articulate both technical and philosophical reasoning about their curricular decisions, as neither alone is sufficient for a robust ‘creed.’

This responds to McCutcheon's (1995) call for teacher education and professional development programs to ‘help teachers become conscious of the nature of deliberation’ (p. 206) and use that consciousness knowledge in a way that allows ‘them to possess it rather than it possessing them’ (p. 206) – what Hansen (2008) calls purposeful teaching that helps teachers express and examine their desire for or hesitation to tell a story that deviates from the dominant narrative. The data collection for this study is an example of an exercise that can encourage this kind of thinking and discussion, and could be a tool for documenting any kind of growth from before and after professional development. They could complete a similar activity then collectively analyze the different themes that emerge and discuss the implications of different narrative frames and reasoning. Teachers also need to read or watch examples of other educators grappling with these choices, making curricular decisions, and navigating the consequences related to external constraints. Articles from magazines like *Rethinking Schools* or *Teaching Tolerance* often provide important firsthand accounts that identify specific strategies teachers can use and tell powerful stories that help give teachers courage to try something different.

Lastly, this study has implications for curriculum developers who wish to provide teachers with resources necessary for a justice-oriented history education that is focused on identifying and analyzing oppression. The participants' criteria for image selection outlined here highlights the need for teachers to have access to primary source photographs that pay attention to their technical demands: that images are relatable to students, tell a story, and have an obvious emotional impact – with some differences among how elementary teachers may prioritize these demands compared with high school teachers. Photographs that may not obviously do this (and even those that do) should come with contextual information and links to other resources for further study that highlight their relevance to social justice issues. Materials need to support teachers' courage to tell a story that deviates from mainstream celebratory narratives that are misleading at best or inaccurate at worst – providing user-friendly materials that do not assume deep background knowledge is one way to do that.

Of course, any curriculum development must provide space for teachers' participation and judgments, not just the ‘implementation of what others have identified as good practice’ which ‘runs the risk of impoverishing dialog, and turning the vital community of teachers into a blunt tool of policy’ (Coldron, & Smith, 1999, p. 721). Without that agentic sense of the value and importance of curricular decision-making, teachers leave these critical and personal choices to those outside their classrooms. Opportunities to develop rich background knowledge steeped in a deep understanding of the histories of oppression will be what helps teachers not only determine if a moment was ‘well-captured,’ but what that moment means in the context of a robust, critical study of the past.

Appendix A. Images

See Appendix Figs. A1–A3.



Fig. A1. *Ruby Bridges* (1960). Photo courtesy of Associated Press.

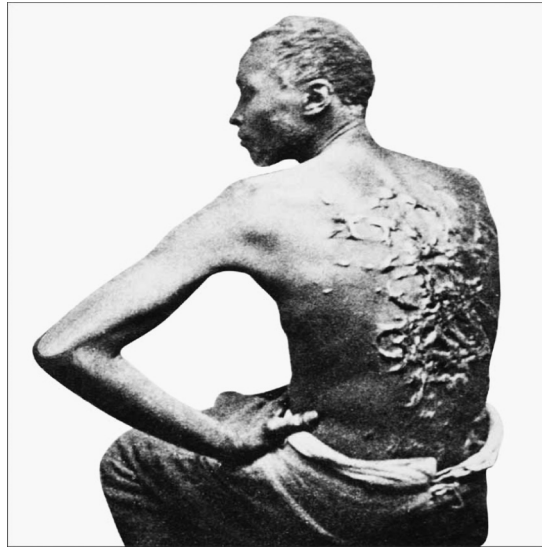


Fig. A2. *Gordon* (1863). Photo courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division U.S. Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-98515.



Fig. A3. *President Obama at Podium* (2008). Photo courtesy of White House Photo Gallery.

Appendix B. Photograph List with Citations

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Katy Swalwell is assistant professor of curriculum and social studies education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her interests are social studies curriculum and social justice education. She is the author of *Educating Activist Allies: Social Justice Pedagogy with the Suburban and Urban Elite* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Anthony M. Pellegrino is assistant professor of history and social studies education at George Mason University where he teaches courses on methods of teaching secondary schools, foundations of education, research on teacher education and education and culture. His research interests include teaching and learning social studies, and clinical experiences of pre-service teachers.

Dr. Jenice L. View, Associate Professor at George Mason University, focuses her scholarship on the critical teaching and learning of history, critical pedagogy in teacher professional development, how the learning of history impacts youth voice and civic engagement, and the use of the arts and arts integration.