TEACHING DURING DIVISIVE TIMES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BLACK FEMALE TEACHERS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

by

Yvonna Hines-McCoy

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Tina Heafner

_____
Dr. Meghan Barnes

_____
Dr. Bettie Ray Butler

_____
Dr. Tracy Rock

ABSTRACT

YVONNA HINES-MCCOY. Teaching During Divisive Times: An Exploratory Study of Black Female Teachers in Social Studies. (Under the direction of DR. TINA HEAFNER)

Social studies education has garnered significant national attention as state governments throughout the country have waged an intentional, political attack against the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and "divisive concepts" in K-12 public schools. Even though CRT is often conflated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and not actually taught at the elementary or secondary level, since January 2021, over one hundred anti-CRT (or divisive concepts) bills have been introduced in more than thirty different state legislatures throughout the country that would prohibit educators from teaching about concepts rooted in race. For Black women teachers, these legislative restrictions create a teaching context that pressures them to divert from the historical work of their predecessors and go against the grain of Black female identity. As such, this phenomenological study explored how Black female social studies teachers teach about race, racism, and oppression given today's hostile sociopolitical climate.

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And lastly, to my participants, thank you. This work would have been impossible without y'all.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Leroy Locklair, and my grandmothers, Yvonne Battle and Van Locklair.

Papa, it hurts deeply to know that you were so close to witnessing this achievement. You are the greatest man I have ever known. I love you, I miss you, and I hope I have made you proud.

To my grandmothers, what better examples of Black motherhood could I have known? Though our time together was far too short, both of you have shaped me into the woman and mother that I am today. Oh, how I wish y'all could see me now. I will forever love you both.

Until we meet again,

Yvonna Jewel

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Social studies education has garnered significant national attention as state governments throughout the country have waged an intentional, political attack against the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and divisive concepts in K-12 public schools. Central to CRT are the notions that race is a social construct, and that racism is much more than individual bias or prejudice; rather, racism is embedded in laws, policies, and systems, and thus, systemic (Sawchuk, 2021). Even though CRT is often conflated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and not actually taught at the elementary or secondary level, since January 2021, over one hundred anti-CRT (or divisive concepts) bills have been introduced in thirty-six different state legislatures throughout the country that would prohibit educators from teaching about concepts rooted in race and/or gender (e.g. sexual orientation, intersectionality, and implicit bias) (Gross, 2022). Given that social studies classrooms generally serve as a space to critically examine and address historical and contemporary issues of race, racism, and oppression, the pressures of today's politically charged context makes it difficult for social studies teachers to teach these topics without fear of retribution. According to a recent study exploring the effects of anti-CRT efforts on educators, there is a rising fear among educators related to divisive concepts legislation (Pollock et al., 2022). In particular, teachers fear that divisive concepts and race-related discussions in the classroom will result in accusations of indoctrination, so, in order to prevent such claims, many teachers have resorted to self-censorship by avoiding these topics and other *controversial matters*[1], such as the dark truths of American history (that accentuate the horrors

[1] Controversial matters refer to topics that could be seen as offensive (e.g. slavery, the Holocaust, Native American removal, etc.) or cause White Americans, according to conservative politicians, to feel discomfort, guilt, and/or distress due to acts of colonization and terror carried out in the past by members of the same race. The use of italics indicates irony regarding the word and how it is used.

inflicted upon African Americans and Indigenous people at the hands of white Americans) (Pollock et al., 2022). In some states, such as Florida, newly adopted *curriculum transparency* legislation forces teachers to publicize instructional materials for parental review (Executive Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022). Parents, in turn, can object to materials they do not like and do not want their children to use (Executive Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2022). In other states, such as Virginia, tip lines have been created to report teachers who have discussed *controversial topics* (e.g. race, gender identity, politics, etc.) and/or violated divisive concepts legislation (Meckler, 2022). Although disguised as authentic attempts to increase parent engagement in students' learning, in reality, *curriculum transparency* bills are nothing more than politically motivated efforts to thwart teacher autonomy and curtail teaching related to race, American history, politics, sexual orientation, and gender identity in public schools (Kingkade, 2022; Meckler, 2022). However, in actuality, only white teachers have the privilege of avoiding *divisive* or contested topics when faced with financial and job loss repercussions. Black female teachers, on the other hand, are confronted with more than these ramifications.

Today's sociopolitical climate puts Black female social studies teachers, in particular, in a fraught position. In essence, they are being asked to deny their racial identity and to dismantle their legacy of uplifting Black history as a cornerstone of the American narrative. This creates an unnatural, irrational dissonance for Black female social studies teachers given that their Black female identity often shapes and informs their instruction and pedagogical decisions. It is natural, and to a certain extent, expected, for Black women teachers to insert themselves and their experiences (as well as the experiences of other racially marginalized groups) into instructional practices to challenge racist, dominant narratives that reinforce false notions of white supremacy. However, today's politicized education environment creates a constraint where Black female

teachers feel compelled to erase themselves (and their experiences), as well as those of Black men, and/or other racially minoritized groups. Under these conditions, Black female social studies teachers cannot create the context necessary to authentically teach about racialized history.

Little is known about how Black female teachers teach topics of race, racism, and oppression when teaching social studies, let alone how Black female teachers are experiencing today's sociopolitical climate attacking CRT and racism. It is imperative that scholarly investigations begin to explore how Black female social studies teachers are experiencing high pressure, politically charged contexts given the sense of responsibility that they often feel to disrupt white supremacy in social studies curriculum. Hence, studying the Black female social studies experience in the teaching of US history is critical in understanding the layered complexities of the intersection of identity, race, and teaching in contentious times. As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore how Black female social studies teachers teach topics of race, racism, and oppression in today's hostile sociopolitical climate.

Given the purpose of this study and the lack of social studies scholarship that exclusively explores Black female teachers' experiences, this research not only sheds light on their challenges and perspectives as suppliers of historical knowledge, but also ways in which Black female social studies teachers can be supported in the workplace by colleagues and district officials and as teacher candidates preparing to enter the social studies classroom. Furthermore, this study helps policymakers and other education stakeholders better understand and address the racialized impacts of legislation (beyond educational gag orders). This is especially important at this moment in time as society becomes increasingly polarized and racial disparities and

systemic inequities remain prevalent in nearly every aspect of American society (e.g. healthcare, income, housing, education, etc.).

Problem Statement

For Black women teachers, legislative attempts to restrict the teaching of race, racism, and oppression create a teaching context that pressures them to divert from the historical work of their predecessors and go against the grain of Black female identity. Though often overlooked and pushed to the margins (in multiple movements), U.S. Black women have played a crucial role (at every level) in the fight for both African American and women's civil rights (Vickery & Salinas, 2019). For example, during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, "Black women were often the ones who initiated protest, formulated strategies and tactics, and mobilized other resources (especially money, personnel, and communication networks) necessary for successful collective action" (Barnett, 1993, p.163), yet they were viewed as inferior to Black men (due to patriarchal values) and excluded from leadership positions. Black women faced a similar struggle during the feminist movement as white women ignored the effects of racial apartheid and upheld the structure of white supremacy within feminism itself (Berry & Gross, 2020; hooks, 2015; Vickery, 2017; Vickery & Salinas, 2019). Despite being marginalized and alienated (from mainstream campaigns), Black women, both individually and collectively, fought on behalf of multiple oppressed groups and "attempted to fight both racist and sexist structures by demanding recognition of their intersectional identities…" (Vickery, 2017, p. 33).

Black women's experiences and identities, unlike Black men and white women, are shaped by both racism and sexism. As a result, African American women see themselves through three lenses (rather than two): race, gender and nationality (Berry & Gross, 2020; hooks, 2015,

Vickery, 2017; Vickery & Salinas, 2019; Welang, 2018). This threefold consciousness, referred to as triple consciousness, informs how U.S. Black women navigate in a white world (Welnag, 2018). For Black women teachers specifically, triple consciousness is a source of insight and direction for educating Black children. According to the literature, Black female teachers use education to build up Black youth and ensure Black survival (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Duncan, 2020; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2009; Watson, 2017). Thus, by default, they are “called both to teach and to provide safe havens from the often-detrimental impacts of race, gender, and inequities in education for Black and Brown students" (Dillard, 2021, para. 6). Intersectionality and ancestral activism prompt the adoption of methods and practices, such as othermothering and cultural transference, that allow Black students to reach their full potential and resist oppressive systems (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1993; Vickery, 2016). Educational gag orders complicate this work, for Black women teachers can only show up as themselves. To suggest that they are capable (or even willing) to intentionally ignore who they are (and participate in their own oppression) in the name of white supremacy is not only impossible, but absurd. Black women teachers, especially those who teach social studies, are integral in impacting institutional and systemic injustices; however, if they are restricted (by law) from teaching and/or discussing race, racism, and/or oppression, their perceptions of their role as an educator (specifically of Black children) are compromised as well as their ability to teach a true history of the United States.

This study addresses the growing interest within academia regarding the ramifications of educational gag orders (i.e. anti-CRT laws and divisive concepts legislation) on Black female social studies teachers given their sense of responsibility to (a) integrate Black women’s experiences and contributions into history education; (b) challenge racist societal structures; and

(c) uplift Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Berry & Gross, 2020; Dixson, 2003; Duncan, 2020; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2009; Watson, 2017). Unlike other studies that explore Black women teachers, this study focused solely on the lived experiences of those who teach U.S. history at the secondary level. Moreover, other studies overlook the unique perspective this study seeks: contextual conflicts with Black female teacher identity, political and legislative pressures to constrain curriculum, and administrative/school/colleague/district supports for Black female teachers.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black female social studies teachers teach about race, racism, and oppression given today's sociopolitical climate. This study also sought to explore the survival, resistance, and reliance techniques Black female social studies teachers employ to navigate their teaching during this time. According to PEN America (2022), as of August 2022, 137 educational gag order bills – state legislative attempts to restrict teaching in K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions – have been introduced in thirty-six different states "compared to 22 states introducing 54 bills in 2021" (para. 3). In less than a year, proposed educational gag orders have increased 250% (PEN America, 2022). Unlike most bills introduced in 2021, educational gag orders introduced in 2022 are more likely to include punitive measures, such as termination, loss of state funding for schools, large monetary fines, or even criminal charges for teachers (PEN America, 2022). While the escalating number of educational gag order bills is disturbing, the continued attacks on teaching related to race and U.S. history, along with efforts to punish teachers who engage with these topics authentically, pose an even greater concern. Research suggests that Black female social studies teachers often use their classroom as a space to reconceptualize entities such as race, racism, and oppression, to align with their

identities, experiences, and community (Vickery, 2016). In doing so, they expose their students to the sociohistorical construction of inequality that has long defined American society (Howell et al., 2019), but must be confronted in order to combat systemic racism and advance systemic equality. For Black female social studies teachers, to teach Black history or counternarratives of white history is to teach a history that comes from within — a hidden history that is not present in formalized curriculum. This is a distinctly different role Black female teachers fill in educating than white teachers. However, with the rise of educational gag order bills that include penalties for violations, Black female social studies teachers face a serious, but shameful dilemma: "remove themselves" from the curriculum and perpetuate whitewashed American history or teach the truth about America's past and risk unemployment. Given the uniqueness and severity of Black female social studies teachers' current predicament, it would be an injustice to ignore or consolidate their experiences with those of their peers.

Study Overview

For my research, I conducted a phenomenological study to explore how Black female social studies teachers teach topics of race, racism, and oppression in today's hostile sociopolitical climate. To collect data for this study, I conducted interviews with four Black women secondary social studies teachers — with two representing the state of North Carolina and the other two, the state of Texas. I analyzed the data collected through a lens of anti-Blackness and Black feminist pedagogy. Because the purpose of this study was situated in the teaching experiences of Black female social studies teachers, criteria for this study stipulated that all participants (a) be at least eighteen years old; (b) identify as a Black woman; (c) be a certified secondary social studies teacher; and (d) currently teach US history/American history

and/or African American studies/history at the secondary level. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do Black female social studies teachers initiate discussions about race and racism with their students, given today's political and social context?

RQ2: How do Black female social studies teachers address (e.g. instructional practice, curriculum, and responses to student questions/comments) race, racism, and oppression in their classroom given today's political and social context?

RQ3: How do Black female social studies teachers describe their teaching experiences in the context of today's hostile political and social climate?

Rationale and Significance of Study

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), approximately 7% of public-school teachers are Black; however, roughly 76% of Black teachers are women. Although the percentage of Black female teachers that teach social studies is currently unknown, their teaching experiences are roughly unaccounted for in contemporary educational research. This gap in the literature is especially concerning considering the critical role Black female social studies teachers play in impacting institutional injustices that disproportionately affect Black and Brown Americans (Howell et al., 2019). Furthermore, given recent attempts to undermine social studies education by limiting learning related to race, racism, and oppression, it is necessary now, more than ever, to explore how Black female social studies teachers are teaching these topics. With that said, this study is significant for three key reasons.

First and foremost, this study is significant because it examines a problem that has yet to be explored. Even though curriculum censorship efforts have occurred in the past, scholarly investigations have failed to consider how such efforts and/or restrictions impact the instructional

practices of Black female social studies teachers specifically. By centering the experiences of Black women social studies teachers, this study not only addresses a gap in the literature, it provides insight into the racialized and gendered ramifications of divisive concepts legislation. Moreover, this study informs district officials on how they can better support and advocate for Black female teachers in the social studies classroom.

Role of the Researcher

My primary role as the researcher in this study was to gain a truthful, comprehensive understanding of how Black female social studies teachers teach about race, racism, and oppression in today's politically charged context. To fulfill this role, I described aspects of myself, such as biases, assumptions, and experiences that may have affected how I conducted this study and/or analyzed and interpreted the data. As the researcher, it was my role to employ techniques that not only aligned with the research design and goals of this study, but protected the anonymity of the participants. Ultimately, it was my role to conduct this study with integrity to ensure the findings are both trustworthy and credible.

Researcher Assumptions

As a Black woman and former secondary social studies teacher in an overwhelmingly conservative state, I have witnessed and experienced, first-hand, the manufactured hysteria surrounding CRT and the impact it has had on K-12 education, educators in general, and my personal thoughts and opinions regarding the media, social studies education, politicians, and "anti-CRT" critics. The political battle over CRT and "divisive concepts" has even altered my perception of the United States (as a whole). Given my feelings and experiences, especially as I struggled to process the lengths people will go to protect white supremacy and deflect from real issues affecting public education, I naturally became curious about how other Black female

social studies teachers are interpreting and experiencing today's socio-political context and in what ways, if any, have their instructional practices been affected by it. I am aware of how my own experiences and beliefs complicated my position as the researcher and caused subjectivity in my work. As a result, this research study was based on several assumptions. First and foremost, this study assumed that the participants were well aware of recent attacks on CRT, as well as efforts to restrict teaching about race, racism, and other "divisive concepts" in schools. This study also assumed that the participants would have a shared experience (as Black female social studies teachers) that contrasts significantly from colleagues of a different race, gender, and/or grade band. Lastly, this study assumed that the racial and gender concordance between the researcher and the participants would furnish a sense of familiarity and comfort that supported and elicited honest responses during the interviews.

Definition of Terms

Black: An individual who identifies their ancestry originating from Africa; Used interchangeably with African American.

Black Feminist Pedagogy: A pedagogical approach that refers to the distinct instructional practices of Black women teachers that are informed by their historical experiences with race, gender, and class (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A theoretical framework derived by several legal scholars, most notably, Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw, that "critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of Color to the bottom tiers" (George, 2021, para. 2). CRT recognizes that race intersects with other identities, including age, gender identity, sexuality, class, etc., to create unique and systemic forms of oppression.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): A term often used to describe policies and programs that "promote the representation and participation of different groups of individuals, including people of different ages, races and ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, genders, religions, cultures, and sexual orientations" (Rosencrance, n.d., para. 1).

Divisive Concepts: Concepts rooted in race, racism, or oppression.

Divisive Concepts Legislation: Bill or law that prohibits the teaching of concepts rooted in race, racism, oppression, or other highly contested matters**.**

Double Consciousness: Theory conceptualized by W.E.B.DuBois that describes U.S. Black identity as twofold and conflicting (DuBois, 1903).

Educational Gag Orders: State legislative efforts to restrict teaching about contentious topics, such as race, gender, and American history, in K-12 and postsecondary environments (PEN America, 2021).

Politicization: To make something political in character; Divides people's social environment into allies and opponents and results in polarization.

Racialized History: Historical topics rooted in race (Merriam-Webster, n.d.); Refers specifically to the history of non-dominant racial groups.

Systemic Racism: Describes the way systems in the United States are structured to produce racial inequalities between Whites and racial and ethnic minorities leading to social conditions that produce racial disparities (DuBois, 1899, 1906); Synonymous with structural racism and institutional racism.

Teacher Fear: Feelings of anxiety and/or threat experienced by teachers often due to politicized educational policies and pressure from school officials and parents.

Transparency Bills: Legislation that requires teachers to disclose instructional materials publicly in order for parents to screen and ultimately determine if they want their children to use them or not (Meckler, 2022).

Triple Consciousness: Theory that builds off of W.E.B. DuBois' notion of double consciousness that argues Black women view themselves through three lenses, race, gender, and nationality, rather than two (Welang, 2018).

White Supremacy: The term used "to describe a sociopolitical economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefits those defined and perceived as white. This system of structural power privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 30).

Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to the problem, relevant literature, the contested context for teaching US history, and the unique educative roles of Black female teachers. With educational gag orders on the rise, today's politicized education environment hinders Black female teachers' ability to center their experiences (as well as the experiences of other racially marginalized groups) in social studies curriculum. Not only does this cause irrational dissonance for Black female teachers (given their sense of responsibility to challenge racist, dominant narratives that reinforce false notions of white supremacy), it inflicts curriculum trauma and educative-psychic violence upon them, too. As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore how Black female social studies teachers address and talk about race, racism, and oppression when teaching U.S. history in today's hostile sociopolitical climate. In particular, this study examined the contextual conflicts with Black female teacher identity, political and legislative

pressures to constrain curriculum, and administrative/school/colleague/district supports for Black female teachers. In the next chapter, I review literature that aligns with the tenets of this study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Review of Literature

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the impact of divisive concepts legislation on the lived experiences of Black women teachers who teach secondary U.S. history in Texas, Florida, or other states with educational gag orders in place. Black female secondary teachers were described through the theoretical lens of Black feminist pedagogy, Black womanhood and motherhood, othermothering, and anti-Blackness. Their lived experiences were explored through intersectionality, curriculum and instruction, and the political context of education/teaching.

In this chapter, I explore how today's politically charged context creates an unnatural, irrational dissonance for Black female social studies teachers. To conceptualize how a politicized education environment influences how Black female social studies teachers teach about race, racism, and oppression, I review literature that explores the politicization of curriculum and instruction during highly charged sociopolitical contexts. Next, I review literature that highlights the experiences and practices of Black women teachers, social studies teachers, and Black female social studies teachers. A presentation of this literature is followed by a critical review of research studies that examine the intersection of identity and content taught. I conclude this chapter with an overview of literature on racialized history.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was situated in the theoretical frameworks of anti-blackness and Black feminist pedagogy. According to Bush (2022):

> In everyday parlance, anti-blackness refers to the specific forms of racism contingent upon or cast through the denigration, disenfranchisement, and disavowal of people

> racialized as Black (and their attendant cultural practices and production). Additionally, anti-blackness is a term that attempts to more accurately name particular types of racist attitudes and practices that are levied against Black people specifically, which can potentially become attenuated through broader terms like racism, or subsumed and obfuscated by popular framings like People of Color (POC) (para. 1).

As a theoretical framework, anti-Blackness refers to the complete disdain of Black people and the inability of Western society to see Black humanity (Dumas, 2016). It is anti-blackness that maintains Black subjugation and "utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13), be it physical or institutional. In the context of U.S. schooling and education, anti-Blackness is:

> an acknowledgement of the long history of Black struggle for educational opportunity, which is to say a struggle against what has always been (and continues to be) a struggle against specific anti-Black ideologies, discourses, representations, (mal) distribution of material resources, and physical and psychic assaults on Black bodies in schools (Dumas, 2016, p. 16).

Divisive concepts legislation is anchored in anti-Blackness and should be recognized for what it is — violence against Black students, Black teachers, and Black visibility.

While the theory of anti-Blackness provides an explanation for educational gag orders (that restrict and/or prohibit the teaching of race, racism, and oppression), Black feminist pedagogy captures the relationship between Black women's multiple oppressed identities and the pedagogical practices they employ (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021). In essence, Black feminist pedagogy is designed to challenge master/majoritarian narratives and ideologies in order to raise the political consciousness and social mobility of

Black students in an anti-Black world. It embodies a philosophy of liberation that is often executed through practices such as othermothering, activist pedagogy, and relationship building (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Foster; 1993; Vickery, 2016).

Hostile Sociopolitical Contexts

The term *divisive concepts* refers to topics rooted in race, racism, oppression, and other highly contested matters. Often referred to as anti-CRT bills (although based on artificial ideas regarding CRT and K-12 instruction), divisive concepts legislation is meant to block or restrict teaching related to race and gender in K-12 schools (Pollock et al., 2022). These bills, regardless of state origin, share similar language and echo text from federal documents and model legislation, or prefabricated bills written by a company or lobbyist, such as the "Partisanship Out of Civics Act" (PEN America, 2021; Pollock et al., 2022; Sergent et al., 2019). PEN America (2021) noted this shared language in a report on legislative restrictions on teaching and learning:

> With only one exception, the bills appear to have been influenced by U.S. Senator Tom Cotton's Saving American History Act, President Trump's 2020 Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping, or conservative lawyer Stanley Kurtz's Partisanship Out of Civics Act. Forty-two bills have a clear antecedent in Trump's executive order (EO), with most of them including a list of prohibited "divisive concepts" related to "race and sex stereotyping" that mirror the EO's language, though there is some variation among the bills' listed concepts (n.p., para. 17).

Divisive concepts bills in states such as Indiana, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Georgia, li ft language verbatim from former President Trump's Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotypes (Herron, 2022). According to Trump's EO, divisive concepts are concepts that suggest:

(1) one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
(2) the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist;
(3) an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
(4) an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex;

(5) members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
(6) an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex;
(7) an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
(8) any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex; or
(9) meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist, or were created by a particular race to oppress another race. (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020)

Through divisive concepts legislation, governmental power is being used to "impose content-and viewpoint-based censorship" (PEN America, 2021, para. 14) that restricts educators from teaching and discussing America's racist history, both past and present. In doing so, these bills champion a nostalgia for a history that did not exist and a whitewashed, Eurocentric, nationalistic curriculum that perpetuates false narratives regarding the history of the United States and the historical, as well as contemporary experiences of racially minoritized populations. Anti-race education efforts, such as divisive concepts legislation, are an effort to turn back the clock on racial equality by hiding these key lessons from future generations — and by erasing the history, trials, and tribulations while ensuring the deculturalization of Black Americans (Spring, 2016).

Furthermore, these bills reflect present-day hostility toward the field of Critical Race Theory, which, in actuality, was introduced "decades ago to investigate the power of laws and policies to perpetuate inequality" (Smith, 2022, para. 16). In particular, CRT posits that racism is systemic, and thus, embedded into U.S. social institutions (e.g. housing, healthcare, and employment), laws, rules, and policies (Sawchuck, 2021). Moreover, because racism is systemic rather than the biases and prejudices of individuals, it is the biggest obstacle to equal opportunity and upward mobility for racially minoritized groups (Smith, 2022, para. 16). However, anti-CRT critics, whether parents, conservatives, or local school board members, argue that the notion of

systemic racism in the United States not only slanders the U.S. as a whole, but is itself racist (Reeve et al., 2021). Additionally, these critics also believe that CRT places blame on white Americans for their ancestors' crimes (e.g. enslavement), pits individuals of different races against one another, and indoctrinates schoolchildren.

In December of 2021, for example, Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, announced the Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) Act:

> In Florida we are taking a stand against state-sanctioned racism that is Critical Race Theory. We won't allow Florida tax dollars to be spent teaching kids to hate our country or to hate each other. We also have a responsibility to ensure that parents have the means to vindicate their rights when it comes to enforcing state standards. Finally, we must protect Florida workers against the hostile work environment that is created when large corporations force their employees to endure CRT-inspired training and indoctrination. (Executive Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, 2021, para. 1)

Anti-CRT bills, such as Florida's "Stop WOKE Act," are targeted efforts to silence discussions about race and block specific educational materials (that deal with race), such as *The New York Times'* 1619 Project which "aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative" (The New York Times, 2019, para. 2).

Since its release in 2019, the 1619 Project has sparked national debate over what students should learn in social studies classrooms. At the center of this discourse are historical topics that are often minimized or misrepresented in mainstream social studies education, including, but not limited to, the legacy of enslavement. While the prime objective of the 1619 Project lies in questioning and reframing the history of the United States (by emphasizing the role slavery played and continues to play in that history), it has been blasted as "anti-American" and racist by anti-CRT critics and politicians alike. From divisive concepts legislation to former President Trump's creation of a 1776 Commission (to promote "patriotic education"), the 1619 Project has

sparked politically charged counter efforts across the nation (PEN America, 2021; Smith-Schoenwalder, 2020), as well as a wave of teacher fear among educators who aspire to teach about race and U.S. history authentically. In exploring the effects of the *conflict campaign* (or anti-CRT efforts) on educators, Pollock et al. (2022) found that "many respondents described a heightened level of what many called "attack," "intimidation," and "threat" from legislation, outside "groups," and local critics, particularly subgroups of highly vocal parents sometimes fueled by politicians" (p. 54). This fear is heightened by the ambiguous language of divisive concepts legislation and the penalties administered to those who misstep, ranging from legal action to monetary fines, or in some instances, unemployment (Smith, 2022). In essence, contemporary campaigns targeting divisive concepts, CRT, and/or the 1619 Project, are direct attacks on teachers of Color given that they are often the ones who carry out anti-racist educational efforts (Hoque, 2021).

Cultural Wars and the History of Attacks on Teachers

Legislative intervention in curriculum has a long history. For decades, conservative politicians, in particular, have sponsored attacks on teachers in order to support their political agenda, limit free speech, and control the big business of education (for capitalist interests) (Laats, n.d.). Historically, these right-wing campaigns have led to cultural wars. A cultural war is a conflict between social groups within a society for dominance of its own beliefs, values, and practices (Collins English Dictionary, n.d., Dictionary.com, n.d.). During the 1920s, for example, state lawmakers throughout the country attempted to outlaw the teaching of evolution and any other "idea that might 'weaken or undermine the religious faith of the pupils' in public schools" (Laats, n.d., para. 3). At the center of this discourse was the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" – the "prosecution of science teacher John Scopes for teaching evolution in a Tennessee public school,

which a recent bill had made illegal" (History.com, 2017, para. 1). Although the trial pitted William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow, two prominent orators of the era, against one another, the real battle was between science and religion — truth and conservatism, ignorance and education (Arnold-Foster, 2022). Ultimately, Scopes was found guilty and fined, but the legacy of the trial rests not in its outcome, but its implications. According to Holden (2021):

> By asserting that he did not need to know what Darrow and the scientists knew, Bryan was calling into question the social value of modern expertise itself…Bryan rejected the premise that the experts really knew what they're talking about any more than he – presenting himself to the court and the public as a simple man of faith — did. (para. 5)

Ignorance thus is both a shield and a weapon used to go on the offensive against the experts themselves. It is a tactic that is still in use today with CRT.

In the following decade, a new attempt at curriculum censorship was launched as politicians aimed to pass laws that reflected anti-communist sentiment and encouraged superpatriotic zeal (Foster, 1997). For over thirty years, teachers bore the brunt of political attacks against the Red Scare (Foster, 1999; Laats, 2022). In some states, loyalty legislation required teachers to take an oath of loyalty (Foster, 1999; Laats, 2022). Those who failed to comply were immediately dismissed and sometimes legally barred from public employment altogether (Foster, 1999). Similar to today, teachers during the late 1940s and early 1950s were accused of indoctrinating children with un-American, liberal ideology (Foster, 1999). However, in reality, one could argue that they were actually pawns in a capitalist political strategy to link labor unrest to communism and to limit free speech and discussion of this unrest in curriculum. The educated challenge inequalities and seek justice-oriented solutions. Ignorance and restrictions on freedom of speech (for public service workers) maintains the status quo.

Curriculum censorship is not new. There have been numerous attempts throughout the history of the United States to restrict what teachers teach and what students learn. However, in

the past, because Black teachers were teaching in segregated schools, they were not attacked in the same manner as white teachers. They were, however, not without challenges, but they were without censorship. White teachers' identities were not under attack unless they identified as a socialist, communist, fascist, atheist, or non-Christian. In contemporary multiracial schools, today's curriculum controversies create a unique and personally concerning challenge for Black educators specifically. Recent attacks on race education, via the targeting of divisive concepts and CRT in schools, have put Black educators — and the lessons they teach on racial inequality — under scrutiny. These lessons are not only being villainized, they are being misconstrued and used to incite ideological warfare, and thus, a contemporary cultural war to censor curriculum and silence America's racialized past (Trouillot, 1995). Attacks on race education are personal for Black educators. They are attacks on their very being. They are organized political efforts to engage in curriculum violence and Black educator trauma.

Black Culture, Black Community and the Role (Legacy) of Black Women

Historic Tradition of Activism

As pillars of the African American community, Black women have long engaged in both organized and everyday efforts to transform political, economic, and social institutions that subject Black Americans, in particular, to second-class citizenship and inequitable outcomes (Berry & Gross, 2020; Collins, 2009). Though often excluded from and/or marginalized by mainstream campaigns (including early renditions of the feminist movement and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s) (hooks, 2015), Black women's long standing commitment to challenging racism and sexism have played a critical role in shaping institutional change, or as contemporary social theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2009) noted, "efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other

social institutions" (p.219). More specifically, Collins (2009) conceptualized Black women's activism by describing its two primary dimensions:

> The first, struggles for group survival, consist of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing social structures because, in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred nor possible…The second dimension of Black women's activism consists of struggles for institutional transformation – namely, those efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures of government, schools, the workplace, the media, stores, and other social institutions.
> (p. 219)

In their exploration of U.S. Black women's histories, Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, two leading Black female scholars and historians, found that "Black women have defended against rapist enslavers, transported children north in search of a better way of life, celebrated themselves with raucous partying, and organized as washerwomen and clubwomen" (p. 5). Black women, such as Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Poinsette Clark and countless others, used teaching — educating — as an instrument for social change, liberation, and racial uplift (Murray & Woyshner, 2017; Pierre, 2010). As noted by Black feminist thinker, bell hooks (1994), as she reflected on her experiences growing up and being taught by Black women teachers in the segregated South:

> They were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers — Black folks who used our 'minds.' We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anti-colonial. Within these segregated schools, Black children who were deemed exceptional, gifted, were given special care. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race. My teachers were on a mission. (p. 2)

The point is, as noted by Collins (2009), U.S. Black women, even though they possessed "neither the opportunity nor the resources to confront oppressive institutions directly" (p. 224), engaged in everyday strategies of resistance and created spheres of influence within "institutions that

traditionally have allowed African-Americans and women little formal authority or real power" (p. 225). To be Black and female in a country that is both racist and sexist drove Black women to mobilize and challenge America to fulfill its promise of liberty and justice for all. Whether as religious leaders, musicians, or activists, Black women have always been on the front lines in the fight for racial and gender equality. For instance, Ida B. Wells openly challenged racism, sexism, and anti-Black violence in court and through journalism so much so, Berry and Gross (2020) stated:

> Ida B. Wells, who had grown in to a renowned journalist and militant social justice activist, fearlessly canvassed the South, investigating lynchings and publishing the true facts surrounding the murders of Black women and men. In her newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech*, and in two published reports, *Southern Horrors* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895), Wells, the daughter of formerly enslaved Black people from Holly Springs, Mississippi, exposed the white lies undergirding mainstream excuses for mob violence. (p. 108).

Black suffragists, including Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), supported Wells' antilynching campaign while also organizing efforts to secure female suffrage (Berry & Gross, 2020). Following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Black women, such as Alice Presto, ran for public office while others organized voter registration efforts to secure Black people's access to the polls (Berry & Gross, 2020). Prominent civil rights activists, such as Pauli Murray, Ella Baker, Diane Nash, and Fannie Lou Hamer, directly challenged de jure and de facto segregation, as well as racial discrimination, in general. Similarly, artists, such as Nina Simone, used music as a platform for political activism." Through her lyrics, Simone challenged racial injustice and supported Black civil rights:

> As she explained, "I sat down at my piano. An hour later I came out of my apartment with the sheet music for 'Mississippi Goddam.'" The song, decrying racial injustice and mainstream entreaties for African Americans to be more patient about civil rights, tapped into and unleashed the mounting range and frustration taking hold among African

> Americans and among Black people throughout the diaspora. (Berry & Gross, 2020, p. 182)

Other like-minded Black women, including Black lesbian poet and feminist writer, Audre Lorde, authored essays, speeches, and other literary works to not only ignite and acknowledge Black women's activism, but to critique traditional feminist ideology that ignored the racially imperialistic base of U.S. Black women's experiences. In her speech, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), Lorde called out the failure of white academic feminists to recognize the differences that exist among American women when she realized that poor women, Black and Third world women, and lesbian women, along with their voices and experiences, were excluded from a feminist-themed conference she was asked to participate in (Lorde, 1984; Pierre, 2010). In doing so, she accused white academic feminists of using the tools of a racist patriarchy to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy (Lorde, 1984). In fact, a major theme for Black feminists, whether suffragists, writers, or civil rights leaders, was exposing how white supremacy and patriarchy had a profound impact on the lives of Black women (hooks, 2015). For Black women, race and gender are inseparable and the fundamental source of their distinctive positionality and history in the United States (hooks, 2015).

Black Women and Motherhood

Within the African American community, Black motherhood, although valued and of central importance, is characterized by notions of self- sacrifice and selflessness (Collins, 1987, 2009). Black mothers are expected to routinely place the needs of others before their own even when doing so jeopardizes their mental, physical, and/or emotional health. They are placed on a pedestal and praised as resilient and superstrong for their thankless sacrifices and unwavering commitment to the well-being of their children, as well as other people's (Black) children, too (Collins, 2009). In the African American community, mothering responsibilities are not restricted

to biological or bloodmothers (Collins, 2009). Othermothers, or Black women who offer maternal assistance to children that are not biologically theirs, play an integral role in supporting and protecting Black children (Collins, 2009). Because African American community norms hold othermothers accountable for Black children just as much as bloodmothers, they too are expected to make sacrifices for the sake of Black children (Collins, 2009; Dillard. 2022).

Whether biological mothers or othermothers, Black mothers are the backbone of the Black race. Historically, they have borne an unfair amount of responsibility to take care not only of themselves, but the entire Black community (White, 2018). As a result, they are glorified and revered within the Black community, but not without consequence (Collins, 2009). The glorification of Black motherhood perpetuates a narrative of self-sacrifice and resiliency that burdens Black women with invisible labor and savior syndrome (White, 2018). These burdens are deeply rooted in West African ideologies that posit motherhood as central to families as well as multigenerational trauma of enslaved and Jim Crow era Black women caregivers who were expected to mother other people's children, including those of their enslavers and white oppressors.

Black Female Teachers

Black Feminist Pedagogy

Black feminist pedagogy, also known as womanist pedagogy, refers to the particular instructional practices of Black women teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Omolade, 1987). It derives from Black feminist theory which is used “generally to represent the cultural, historical, and political positionality of African-American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the United States” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p.37). Unlike traditional feminist theory (which ignores the racial

caste hierarchy of American society) (hooks, 2015), Black feminist theory recognizes how intersectionality produces experiences distinct from Black men and women of other racial/ethnic groups (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2009). Building off of their historical experience with race, gender, class, etc., Black women teachers employ methods and practices that (a) support the academic and social development of Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021); (b) counter dominant ideologies and negative stereotypes about Black Americans (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; King, 2014; Vickery, 2017); and (c) give voice and visibility to the experiences of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; King, 2014). According to the literature, as a historically oppressed group, Black women understand best how systems and institutions, such as public education, reinforce racial hierarchy and streamline the invisibility and disposability of Black Americans in various realms of U.S. society (e.g. healthcare, housing, employment, etc.). This collection of knowledge affords Black women teachers the opportunity to use intellectual and pedagogical mechanisms as a means to disrupt anti-Black racism and to support the "personal and social emancipation of Black youth not only from physical forms of harms that can be present within schools, but also from symbolic forms of harm that privilege limited ways of knowing and discount or devalue other forms" (Mckinney de Royston, 2020, p. 384). Black feminist pedagogy raises the political consciousness of students. It is demonstrated through practices such as politically relevant teaching, othermothering, warm demanding, and an ethic of care. Black feminist pedagogy disrupts and dismantles anti-Black educational racism.

Political Nature of Teaching

According to the literature, even during times of daunting obstacles and legitimized anti-Black racism (e.g. Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, and the era of Jim Crow) and

extreme resource restrictions, Black women teachers have used educational labor as a means to emancipate and uplift Black youth (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Duncan, 2020; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2009; Watson, 2017). For example, during the age of segregation, as state-adopted textbooks dehumanized and demonized the Black race, Black textbooks used in Black schools emphasized the centrality of Black contributions to America's development and the global community. Black women teachers taught Black students about the accomplishments of Black people in order "to debunk negative messages students encountered about who they were and of what they were capable" (James-Gallaway et al., 2021, p. 134). In her exploration of Black women teachers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools, Kristal Moore (2009) found that Black women teachers used political relevant teaching to engage in everyday acts of resistance:

> I did not think of teaching at Freedom School as an educational experience as much as I did of it as an organizing experience. It was just an extension to me of working with the Civil Rights Movement and I don't even think I thought of it as much of "teaching." (p. 112)

This activist-oriented view and use of teaching represents the dimension of Black women's activism that has long characterized their work as educators (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003).

Scholars agree that Black women teachers have always understood the political nature of teaching (Vickery, 2016). Vickey (2016, 2017), a leading scholar in Black women social studies teachers, conducted qualitative case studies that explored how Black women social studies teachers taught notions of citizenship to their students. Her studies showed that Black women social studies teachers connect Black sociocultural experiences with Black students 'classroom experiences to contest mainstream discourse surrounding citizenship, and thus, create a safe and legitimate space for Black students to exist. Black women teachers recognize education as a

means to disrupt white supremacy and challenge the subjugation of the African American community (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Howell et al., 2019; King, 2015; Vickery, 2016, 2017). As a result, Black women teachers often feel a sense of responsibility to decenter whiteness within educational spaces, yet, at the same time, prepare Black students and other students of Color how to successfully navigate white supremacy (Duncan, 2020). Not only do they teach in ways that consider the sociopolitical context, they modify and adopt curriculum and pedagogy to support what they believe is best for their students (Duncan, 2020; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Watson, 2017).

In a narrative inquiry study on how Black women teachers help Black students navigate white supremacy in the contemporary context (where racism is both invisible and hypervisible), Duncan (2020) found that participants made sure their students were aware that they would inevitably experience racism. In doing so, participants often provided opportunities for their students to speak about their experiences with racial discrimination (Duncan, 2020). Similar to their forebears (e.g. Black women teachers of the Mississippi Freedom Schools), these Black women teachers cultivated a classroom environment that gave voice to their students' feelings and experiences with racial discrimination.

> Ms. Crawford used the stories that her students told to frame the perspective from which she taught American government. She taught them which laws were violated when they experienced discrimination, and she helped students understand which aspects of the law were supposed to protect them from such discrimination. Ms. Crawford expressed strong views about helping her students develop their voices to speak about their oppression, explaining, 'My role is to develop the voice and encourage the voice. Your voice needs to be developed. That's my job as a Black teacher.' (Duncan, 2020, p. 11)

For Black women teachers, the work of teaching is an opportunity to build Black and Brown agency, and thus, help Black students and other students of Color see themselves as resilient, empowered, agentic beings rather than as victims (Duncan, 2020). Considering the legacy of

Black women's activism and the ongoing struggle for Black educational opportunity, political missions of Black women teachers, such as cultivating Black agency, are essential to combating educational injustice:

> As per DuBois, what Blacks still need is an education. They do not need segregated nor integrated schools, but schools that ensure their ability to thrive academically, psychologically, and socio-culturally. The Black Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, however, emphasized school desegregation over a fundamental attack on "all [educational] policies of racial subordination" (Bell 1976, p. 488). The basic evil of segregated schools has thus survived and flourished and, as is demonstrated by Shedd and Lewis and Diamond, has been reasserted in new and damaging forms in racially integrated schools (Bell 1976). At the same time, most Black children today attend majority minority schools where they are systematically denied high quality educational resources. The issue which arises is from where will the U.S. public generate the will and commitment to move decisively against both these reassertions and the enduring expression of separate and unequal educational systems. (Connor, 2016, p. 424)

The negative impact of segregated schools still has an effect on racialized integrated schools. However, what DuBois alluded to is who will recognize the severity of this issue and feel compelled to mobilize against racialized educational injustice:

> And what role will Black folks play in inciting this will and commitment? The work of Shedd and Lewis and Diamond inadvertently raises this question. In response, researchers need to document and analyze the power and agency that exists among Black folk and the prospect of them spawning in this contemporary era a new Civil Rights Movement that attacks all policies of racial subordination. (Connor, 2016, p. 424)

Black women teachers occupy the front lines of this work. Through abolitionist teaching, Black women teachers contest oppressive systems, such as the U.S. educational system, from within (Love, 2019). Their activist-oriented pedagogies nurture both agency and activism, which are integral to leading the fight against racialized educational inequality. It is difficult, however, to conceptualize this work as the role of schools, too, and not just Black women teachers:

> The concomitant challenge is for researchers to explore whether and how schools might be a resource in, rather than an impediment to, the cultivation or articulation of not only Black (and Brown) agency but the agency of other racial subjects who will function as allies towards this end." (O'Connor, 2016, p. 424)

This call for research, sparked by Carla O'Connor, a Black woman in academia who often explores how "Black educational resilience and vulnerability is structured by social, institutional, and historical forces" (Institute for Research on Women and Gender, n.d., para. 1), is explicit to the purpose of this study and the historical role of Black women teachers. Black women teachers have established themselves as agents of change. The Black community, for example, not only relies on, but looks toward Black women teachers to use education as a means to engage in political work that defies oppressive systems and moves the race forward (Collins, 2009). Although their activist-oriented pedagogies support this crucial, yet taxing work, practices of Black women teachers, such as othermothering, do, too.

Othermothering

Othermothering, a key characteristic of Black feminist pedagogy, refers to "feelings of shared responsibility in the social and emotional development of all children in a community" (Vickery, 2016, p. 37). In essence, othermothering is a form of both communal childrearing and racial uplift that gives Black women, in particular, "rights" to care for and support biologically unrelated children (Collins, 2009). Deriving from Black communal norms with African diasporic roots and African American patterns of mothering, academic othermothering is characterized by Black women teachers acting as surrogate mothers to all students and treating them as their own (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Vickery, 2016). As othermothers, Black women teachers display concern for the whole child rather than just their academic well-being (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Foster, 1993). Furthermore, through academic othermothering, Black women teachers work on behalf of the Black community to address the social conditions and psychological needs of Black children (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2009; Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Greene, 2020). According to Collins (2009):

> Community othermothers work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability. Such power is transformative in that Black women's relationships with children and other vulnerable community members are not intended to dominate or control. Rather, their purpose is to bring people along, to–in the words of late nineteenth century Black feminists "uplift the race" so that vulnerable members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance. (Collins, 2009, p. 208)

Motherwork in the spirit of Black women who love and teach Black children is what animates the Black community/culture/village and provides nourishment for Black teachers' teaching, politics, spiritual consciousness, creativity, and ultimately lives (Dillard, 2022).

As academic othermothers, Black women teachers engage in a tradition of activism that further illustrates Black women's historical commitment to group survival, or the larger needs of the Black community (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). This work, although crucial, can be daunting and lead to what author and diversity consultant, Mary-Frances Winters, describes as Black fatigue, or the "repeated variations of stress that results in extreme exhaustion and causes mental, physical and spiritual maladies that are passed down from generation to generation" (Owens, 2021, para.14). Given the distinct burdens and expectations of Black women teachers, the physical, emotional, and psychological drain that they endure exceeds general racialized fatigue. Unlike Black male teachers and other women teachers of Color, Black women teachers act as othermothers, which add layers to their fatigue. Similar to parenting, there is a psychological drain to othermothering, especially for Black women.

Throughout the history of the United States, American society was highly dependent on Black women's bodies, motherwork, and othermothering practices. Enslaved Black women, for example, were forced to nurse white women's babies while having to sacrifice the health and nourishment of their own bodies and children. Black women have carried the burden of raising other people's children for centuries. Consequently, the tradition of othermothering is, in essence,

ingrained in their multi-generational identity (and trauma). For Black women teachers, othermothering is a critical component of their pedagogy and identity (Dillard, 2022), as well as a reminder of the invisible weight, burden, and/or trauma they have always carried and continue to carry as Black women. There is both a pride in African motherwork and a trauma of how this was (and is) exploited in racialized, capitalistic educational systems.

Ethic of Caring and Relationship Building

According to the literature, Black women teachers view teaching as a way to improve the lives of Black students, their communities, and American society as a whole (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Howell et al., 2019). As a result, Black women teachers often feel a sense of responsibility and commitment "toward the African American community in general and the particular children they teach from those communities" (Dixson, 2003, p. 219). For Black women teachers, teaching is an act of public service and means of racial uplift (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Hill-Brisbane, 2005) that has long characterized Black educational philosophy (Perkins, 1993). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, educated African Americans, both male and female, were viewed as vehicles for uplift and advancement of the Black race (Hill-Brisbane, 2005). However, after the Civil War, it was Black female educators in particular who embraced this ideology, and, consequently, went to the South not only to teach newly freed men and women, but to work in the interest and betterment of the African American community, too (Perkins, 1993).

The literature suggests that racial uplift, despite its emphasis on group effort and collective responsibility, is contingent upon a critical element of Black women teachers' pedagogy; the ability to establish meaningful relationships with Black students (Dixson, 2003). Vickery (2016) found that Black women teachers built positive relationships and strong

connections with students by creating safe spaces where Black students and other students of Color could exist freely as themselves. These teachers created what Vickery (2016) referred to as a s*ense of belonging* that made students feel "at home." By practicing a politicized ethic of care, Black women teachers nurture and support the academic and socioemotional needs of their Black students while pushing them to do their best in the classroom (Greene, 2020; Milner, 2006).

Warm Demanders

Scholars have found that the pedagogy and beliefs of Black female teachers cultivate dynamic learning environments that nurture Black students, and other students of Color, to academic success (Howell et al., 2019; Ware, 2006). As othermothers and *warm demanders* in their classrooms, Black female teachers assume an authoritarian style of parenting reflective of African American parenting norms and values (Ware, 2006). Warm demanders are defined as teachers that provide "a tough-minded, no nonsense, structured and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society had psychologically and physically abandoned" (Ware, 2006, p. 436). Although often misconstrued as abrasive and hostile, warm demander pedagogy demonstrates an ethic of care and concern that allows Black female teachers to maintain high academic expectations and act as a cultural bridge for their students' families (Delpit, 2012; Hambacher et al., 2016). Given that these teachers understand mainstream educational expectations and the needs of the African American community, school and community are recognized, not as separate entities, but as reciprocal environments (Howell et al., 2019). In his study of Black teachers' experiences, impact, and success with Black students, Milner (2006) explained how culture and community showed up in their teaching:

> Because Black teachers often interacted with Black students and their parents outside of school (in the grocery stores, and at church, for instance) they had an insider's perspective on how Black students lived and experienced life outside of the classroom, and they were able to use this knowledge and understanding in the classroom with their

> students — to provide optimal learning opportunities for students. Black teachers were equipped to bring cultural understanding and connections into the classroom, partly because of how they lived their lives outside of the classroom. (p. 99)

As warm demanders, Black female teachers demonstrate practices consistent with what Ladson-Billings (1995) defines as *culturally relevant pedagogy*. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three key tenets: "a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a crucial consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Through warm demanding, culturally relevant pedagogy, Black female teachers afford Black students the opportunity to see themselves in their learning and reach their full academic potential (Ware, 2006).

Social Studies Teachers

Given the racialized history of all disciplines within social studies, social studies classrooms are often viewed as spaces to have critical discussions about race, racism and oppression (Demoiny, 2018; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2003; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). However, social studies teachers, in particular, white social studies teachers, often feel uncomfortable and unprepared to engage in these conversations effectively (Pollock et al., 2022). As a result, these teachers tend to avoid hard conversations about contested topics in their classroom (Busey & Mooney, 2014; Hess, 2005; Journell, 2011; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). Demoiny (2018) argues that meaningful racial discourse is highly dependent on teachers' working racial knowledge and because social studies educator programs have yet to make teaching about race a central component in curriculum (Demoiny, 2018; Quiocho & Rios, 2000), teachers who engage students in race-based conversations rely heavily on their personal experiences to guide such dialogue and aligning instructional practices (Quiocho & Rios, 2000;

Salinas & Castro, 2010; Vickery, 2021). In a critical autoethnographic study examining how she navigated the dilemma of learning and teaching history as a racial queer, Vickery (2021) explained how she used her cultural knowledge to adopt a pedagogy of race that created a safe learning space where her students could grow in their knowledge of race and the impact of racism on society:

> In my classroom we privileged diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices that served to challenge the master narrative. Using multicultural texts and primary documents, our class community viewed history through the lens of a diverse array of individuals. We also sought to hold structures and systems accountable for violating the rights of others. For example, our class staged a mock trial that placed President Andrew Jackson on trial for 'crimes against humanity' for his role in the Trails of Death. I invited attorneys from the community to serve as judges during the trial and the students were responsible for writing cross examination questions, calling witnesses, and introducing evidence (primary documents) to make their case. I wanted to not only bring history alive for my students, but to teach them the important lesson of accountability and empowering students to seek justice against oppressors. (p. 494)

Although encouraged by social studies scholars, these practices are not widespread within social studies education (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2003). As noted by Coffey et al. (2015), it is difficult for teachers to engage in critical discourse when they lack awareness of racial and cultural disparities, let alone encouragement and support from colleagues or superiors (Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

Black Female Social Studies Teachers

Although there is a considerable amount of scholarship exploring the work of Black women teachers, there is limited research that explores Black female high school social studies teachers exclusively. However, the dearth literature that does exist maintains that Black female social studies teachers often utilize social studies education as a means to challenge the racial hierarchy and subpersonhood status of African Americans (King, 2014, 2015; Vickery 2016, 2017). Vickery (2017) explored how African American women social studies teachers utilized

their experiential knowledge to teach citizenship and found that participants sought ways “to reconceptualize the construct of citizenship that was unique to their experiences as African American women that would also resonate with their students of color who experienced marginalization as citizens" (p.327). Research suggests that Black female social studies teachers purposefully insert their experiences as Black women into curriculum as a way to challenge master narratives and combat racist beliefs (Duncan, 2020;Vickery, 2021).

Intersection of Identity and Content Taught

Identity is defined as “the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Despite recent scholarship that boasts political identities as the primary identity marker (Van Bavel et al., 2021), the literature maintains that race, given the United States’ long history of racism and oppression, often supersedes other markers of identity, such as gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, and occupation. Race is central to the identity of non-whites, especially Black Americans (Cox & Tamir, 2022). Historically, white Americans (or those atop the racial hierarchy) have used race to justify, legitimize, and reinforce policies that systematically subjugate, dehumanize, exploit, and terrorize Black people (Hannah-Jones, 2022). Blackness is more than a signifier of pigmentation. It is the regulator of Black identity. The very notion of Blackness is what makes the experiences and position of African Americans truly distinct from those of other racial groups in American society. In his text, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), author, activist, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), W.E.B. DuBois, outlines the peculiar conditions of Black identity. DuBois argues that the color line, characterized by racial segregation, is an accessory to white domination and exploitation, and thus, directly responsible for the plight of Black people throughout the world (DuBois, 1903).

Furthermore, it is the color line that causes Black Americans, in particular, to develop what he refers to as *double consciousness*. Double consciousness suggests that Black Americans struggle with identity development because it feels as if their identity is divided into multiple parts. According to DuBois, this identity division that Black Americans experience is the result of living in a society that has historically oppressed and marginalized them. Double consciousness forces Black Americans to build a perception of themselves from their own perspective, as well as from the perspective of their oppressor, making it nearly impossible for Black Americans to develop a positive identity. Ultimately, this *second sight* creates a sense of "twoness" in Black Americans that is equally haunting and defining:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his twoness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes—foolishly, perhaps, but fervently—that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development. (DuBois, 1903, p. 2)

DuBois' message is candid: although complex, Black American identity is exceptional and influential. While some might argue that DuBois' theory of double consciousness helps us better understand African American life, it fails to account for gender, specifically how it intersects with race and nationality to generate a degree of marginalization unbeknownst to Black men.

Similar to DuBois, Black feminist legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, argues that Black identity is characterized by multiplicity. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality, or the conjoining of multiple characteristics, such as race, gender, class, and religion, create multiple

burdens and/or compound discrimination (Crenshaw, 2000). These characteristics, which are experienced simultaneously, interact to create complex intersections (or overlapping systems of discrimination) that subject those with multiple oppressed identities to unique social, political, and economic barriers (Crenshaw, 2000). For example, because Black women are not just Black, but women too, they face both racism and sexism, and thus, experience discrimination and subjugation in ways similar to and different from Black men and white women (Vickery et al., 2019). As a result, Black womanhood is often characterized by common experiences of exploitation and domination, or *triple consciousness*. Building off of DuBois' theory of double consciousness, triple consciousness argues that Black women see themselves through three lenses rather than two: race, gender, and nationality (Welang, 2018). This threefold consciousness, characterized by intersectional complexities, informs how U.S. Black women navigate a world which attempts to define Black feminist experiences from the perspective of oppressors, both Black men and white men, as well as white women (Welang, 2018). Even as early as the 1800s, Black women recognized how their raced and gendered identities shaped their life experiences in jobs, the economy, families, and society. In her most famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman," abolitionist and women's rights activist, Sojourner Truth, advocated specifically for Black women's rights as she criticized the effects of both sexism and racism on Black women (Smiet, 2020).

Intersectionality not only influences Black womens' experiences and perspectives, but also how they make decisions. According to the literature (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Hudson-Vassell et al., 2018 Vickery et al., 2019), pedagogical decisions, in particular, are heavily informed by identity. Identity influences what teachers teach, how they teach, and the level of comfortability in which they teach (Dillard, 2022). In her study on how African American

women social studies teachers draw on personal knowledge to teach citizenship, Vickery (2016) found that “their understanding and teaching of citizenship was shaped largely by their epistemological standpoint as African American women" (p.40). Unfortunately, however, there is a dearth of literature examining the intersection of Black women teachers’ identity and content taught.

Racialized History

For centuries, U.S. social studies education has served as an accessory to Eurocentrism and white supremacy (King, 2017; King & Woodson, 2017). Beginning in the late nineteenth century, social studies curriculum and textbooks were used to inscribe power and dominance over racially minoritized populations (or non-dominant groups), specifically African Americans, while elevating whites and positioning whiteness as superior (King, 2014). Through social studies education, racist and anti-Black ideologies, half-truths, and misinformation regarding the experiences and contributions of African Americans were (and continue to be) propagated and ingrained into the psyche of all students, regardless of race (King, 2014). Nowhere is this injustice more apparent than in U.S. history curriculum. Fueled by whiteness, U.S. historical memory is guided by nationalist master narratives. These master narratives are one-dimensional, simplistic accounts of U.S. history told solely from the perspective of white, heterosexual, middle-class men (Journell, 2008; King, 2014; Love, 2019). As a result, when historical or contemporary issues rooted in race, racism, and oppression emerge in the curriculum, these entities fail to challenge mainstream historical knowledge, including renditions of Black history, further perpetuating historical inaccuracies.

U.S. Historical Memory

There is an African proverb that states, "Until the lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." According to the literature, this quote best explains how, and more importantly, why, U.S. history curriculum fails to reflect a complete, more truthful account regarding the history of the United States (King, 2014). History is manufactured by powerful groups with agendas (King , 2019) and because white, heterosexual, middle-class men have always wielded and maintained power throughout the history of the United States, U.S. history is examined (and often interpreted) through their eyes – the eyes of the oppressor (Journell, 2008; King et al., 2017). Mainstream social studies education showcases their histories, the histories of the dominant. In doing so, the voices, experiences, and realities of the oppressed remain unspoken, unheard, and distorted (King, 2017; Vickery et al., 2019). Research suggests that the obliteration of the Black past not only preserves white hegemony and domination, it subjects Black students, in particular, to inequitable learning experiences that heighten their exposure and development of harmful entities, such as racial inferiority complex, negative self-concept, and misogynoir (Berry & Gross, 2020; Love, 2019). According to King et al. (2017), master narratives inflict curriculum trauma/violence (or educative-psychic violence) upon Black bodies. Originally coined by Leonardo et al. (2010) to describe the negative effects of downplaying the significance of racism when engaging in race-based conversations, educative-psychic violence is an educational concept that explains the type of harm students experience when curriculum mistreats racialized history, especially slavery (King & Woodson, 2017).

Previous studies have shown that most students' initial point of reference regarding the history of Black people in America begins with slavery (King & Woodson, 2017). This is

incredibly disturbing considering that the history of African Americans does not begin with centuries' worth of unimaginable violence and oppression (King, 2017): African American history predates American slavery (Berry & Gross, 2020; Clarke, 1998). However, despite the preceding, master narratives continue to allude that the history of an entire group of people does not begin until millions were involuntarily removed from their homeland and enslaved in a foreign nation, further miseducating generations of Americans. The literature suggests that by introducing students to the history of African Americans with slavery, social studies curriculum manifests educative-psychic violence (King & Woodson, 2017). King and Woodson (2017) argue that social studies curriculum and instructional strategies are recognized as educative-psychic violence when they:

> 1) make the values and practices that are often associated with European cultures the standard through which all other cultures are evaluated;
> 2) exclusively represent people of color in oppressed or subordinate positions;
> 3) suggest that all people of color think, behave and act in the same ways, ignoring complexity and diversity; and
> 4) offer simplistic or superficial accounts of Non-White persons' history that relegates them to exceptional representatives of the race and within certain fixed historical time periods. (p. 5)

When mainstream social studies education fails to cover slavery adequately, let alone critically, social studies curriculum and thought manifests educative-psychic violence and spirit murdering (Love, 2019). Consequently, Black students nor non-Black students are able to recognize slavery as a fully institutionalized system, which prevents them from becoming racially conscious about contemporary power structures (King, 2019; King & Woodson, 2017). Furthermore, educative-psychic violence that stems from one-dimensional narratives of slavery spur deficit perspectives of Black culture, Black history, and of course, Black people (King & Woodson, 2017). When Black teachers are required to teach mandated curriculum or standards that

replicate educative-psychic violence, their attempts to subvert curriculum oppression/silencing are threatened; however, this gap in the literature has not been studied.

Black History

In order to preserve racial power dynamics and the status quo, Black history is often ignored or misrepresented in official social studies curriculum (King, 2019; Thornhill, 2016; Vickery et al., 2019). As a result, students absorb monolithic narratives of Black history that fail to acknowledge its richness, diversity, and complexity (Brown & Brown, 2010; Clarke, 1998; Thornhill, 2016). According to the literature, these narratives routinely overemphasize racial progress, marginalize radical African American figures and organizations, and ignore societal and cultural contributions of African Americans (Journell, 2008; Thornhill, 2016). Furthermore, these historical narratives do not address the racial violence experienced by African Americans at the hands of their white counterparts nor recognize race as an institutional and structural factor with contemporary implications (Brown & Brown, 2010; Thornhill, 2016).

Scholars argue that K-12 social studies textbooks contribute significantly to the circulation of these narratives (Brown & Brown, 2010; King, 2014). Even though contemporary social studies texts are considered to be more inclusive, according to Brown and Brown (2010), they still distort, minimize, and oversimplify the experiences of African Americans. Previous studies have shown that references made to African Americans in social studies texts are often confined to discourse on oppression and liberation (Journell, 2008). The literature maintains that social studies curriculum and textbooks rarely, if ever, highlight the cultural, political, and scientific contributions of African Americans (Brown & Brown, 2010). The absence of these stories creates a grand narrative of Black history defined by the following topics and figures: slavery, Reconstruction, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights movement (Journell, 2008;

Vickery et al., 2019). In his study of African American representation in state standards, Journell (2008) found that out of the nine states' standards that were examined, the only topics explicitly mentioned in each of the state standards aligned with African American struggles to gain equality: slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights movement. Only seven states mentioned cultural contributions of African Americans, but nothing beyond the 1920s or Harlem Renaissance (Journell, 2008). Contemporary African American issues and contributions received the least amount of attention:

> Despite ongoing debate over the merits of affirmative action in the United States, only four states deem the issue salient enough for inclusion in their standards. Moreover, only North Carolina includes accomplishments of African Americans beyond the Civil Rights Movement. They include the entry of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and Colin Powell as the first African American Secretary of State. (Journell, 2008, p. 44)

Martin Luther King Jr. was the most cited African American (with eight references) followed by Frederick Douglass (with seven references) (Journell, 2008). According to Journell (2008):

> African Americans in state standards are often represented as either oppressed or fighting to free themselves from oppression. All of the states cover slavery, segregation, and the fight for civil rights, as they all should. However, states mention these hardships without equal recognition of cultural, political, or economic achievement by African Americans. It does not seem coincidental that the two individuals displayed most prominently within these states are a civil rights leader and an abolitionist. While King and Douglass deserve their place alongside Hamilton, Lincoln, and Roosevelt, where are the African American equivalents to Thoreau, Edison, and Ruth? African American authors, entertainers, and inventors often are not household names, and this study suggests that such ignorance may be partly influenced by the version of American history students learn in school. (p. 45)

Scholars argue that Black students are at risk of seeing themselves from a deficit point of view and believing the master narrative when cultural, political, and economic achievements of African Americans are excluded from the teaching of Black history (Clarke, 1998). In his exploration of Black students' experience learning African American history in high school, Thornhill (2016) found that racially conscious Black students often resisted incomplete and/or biased narratives of African American history being taught in schools. He discovered that these

students conducted independent research, talked with family, and directly challenged teachers and administrators when they felt that their history was being neglected (Thornhill, 2016). When textbooks are wrong or full of misinformation about Black history, teachers become the only counternarrative source. However, the responsibility to create a pedagogical counternarrative to reframe racist U.S. history curriculum, or alternative Black curriculum (Murray, 2018) is taken up by Black female teachers, but far too often avoided by white female teachers because of lack of knowledge. History textbooks are one of the most important artifacts in helping students understand the African American experience (Brown & Brown, 2010) and given its prevalence as the most used source in the high school classroom, the malinformation of textbooks is not only problematic, but remains largely unchallenged since the majority of the teaching force are white educators (Brown & Brown, 2010).

Summary of Reviewed Literature

This chapter presents a review of literature that contextualizes and conceptualizes the severity of Black female social studies teachers' current predicament. First, I discussed literature related to contemporary campaigns targeting divisive concepts and CRT then connected these attempts at curriculum censorship to cultural wars and previous attacks on teachers. Next, I explored literature related to Black culture, Black community, and the role/legacy of Black women in order to frame African American women's histories as it relates to activism and cultural expectations. I followed this review with research on both Black female teachers (particularly their exemplary pedagogical practices) and social studies teachers, including their approach to racial discourse. Afterwards, I examined Black female identity and the impact of intersectionality on the perspectives and teaching experiences of Black women social studies teachers. I concluded the literature review with a synthesis of research specific to racialized

history. While the studies presented in this review provide insight into factors influencing Black women teachers' experiences, it leaves out an extensive exploration of the modern-day impact of educational gag orders (and political hostility) on Black female social studies teachers (who address topics of race, racism, and oppression when teaching U.S. history). This dissertation study not only responds to this gap, but highlights how educational stakeholders can better support, advocate, and prepare Black women teachers in/for the social studies classroom.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an outline of the methods for data collection and data analysis that were used to conduct this study. I first discuss the purpose of this study and significant elements of the research design. Next, I explain the recruitment and participant selection process and data collection strategies. Additionally, I provide the procedures for analyzing the data, my positionality as a researcher, and limitations of the study.

The Purpose

There is a limited amount of research that explores Black female social studies teachers exclusively. Moreover, the literature that does exist fails to explore Black female social studies teachers working during periods of political and social tension. Today, educational gag orders, such as divisive concepts legislation and anti-CRT laws, jeopardize Black female social studies teachers' ability to teach an authentic and inclusive history of the United States — one that explores historical and contemporary issues related to race, racism, and oppression. In essence, these laws ask Black women to ignore their identity (as a historically marginalized group), omit themselves from the curriculum, and abandon the tenets of Black feminist pedagogy. As a result, this study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black female social studies teachers initiate discussions about race and racism with their students, given today's political and social context?

RQ2: How do Black female social studies teachers address (e.g. instructional practice, curriculum, and responses to student questions/comments) race, racism, and oppression in their classroom given today's political and social context?

RQ3: How do Black female social studies teachers describe their teaching experiences in the context of today's hostile political and social climate?

Research Design

This study was informed by a phenomenological research design. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research seeks to understand subjective human experiences. Mertens (2020) noted that the intent of phenomenological research is to "understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participant" (p. 255) and it varies from other qualitative research approaches because "the subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry" (p.255). Finally, according to Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenological research seeks to "describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it" (p. 91). Considering that this study sought to understand the teaching experiences of Black female social studies teachers specifically, a phenomenological approach best supports and captures the essence of their experiences. This study, guided by theoretical frameworks of Black feminist pedagogy and anti-Blackness, posits that individuals have unique experiences because of racial and gender identity. Through phenomenology, I was able to dive deep into the subjective experiences of Black women teachers — a group historically ignored and silenced. Even though this study had a small number of participants, the participants have first-hand knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, because a phenomenological approach was employed, I learned more about the ways in which race, gender, context, etc. shape teacher experiences in the U.S.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Because the purpose of this study was situated in the teaching experiences of Black women exclusively, it was appropriate to only have Black women as participants. In particular, participants in this study were (a) at least eighteen years old; (b) Black women (c) certified secondary social studies teachers; and (d) currently teaching US history/American history and/or

African American studies/history at the secondary level. At the time of this study, two participants taught in Texas. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Convenience sampling is a method of non-probability sampling in which the researcher chooses the sample out of convenience — time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, etc. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to time restraints, professional limitations, and the goals of this study, convenience sampling was identified as the most appropriate sampling method to use. I originally used social media, specifically Twitter, to recruit participants. However, after Nikole Hannah-Jones retweeted the recruitment flier for this study, I received numerous emails from racist white men pretending to be qualified participants. So, for safety reasons and overwhelming feelings of frustration, I opted to recruit participants based on referrals from associates within my professional network. Ultimately, I used my research questions to guide me as I selected four participants (from two states) to participate in this study. Considering that this was a phenomenological study, the number of participants was not as important as selecting participants that could speak thoroughly and provide details about the phenomenon being studied. As a result, the participants were selected based on who I believed would best help me address the research questions. I considered entities, such as years of experience, physical location, and school demographics. Ideally, I wanted the participants to be public high school U.S. history teachers (with at least six years of teaching experience) and currently teaching at a racially diverse school — a school where no one race makes up more than 50% of the student body. However, given the impact of Nikole Hannah-Jones' retweet, these initial preferences were abandoned as my pool of candidates became extremely limited. However, despite the preceding, I still wanted some participants to be teachers in right-to-work states with divisive concepts legislation in place (e.g. Florida, Virginia, and Texas). Teachers in

these states are not only subject to curricular censorship, they also have few legal protections when it comes to keeping their jobs. Prior to conducting the study, I provided participants with pertinent information (e.g. terms of commitment) and obtained their consent.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary source for data collection in this study. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), in the semi-structured interview, "the researcher has a specific topic to learn about, prepares a limited number of questions in advance, and plans to ask follow-up questions" (p. 31). Three interviews, each approximately 60-90 minutes in length, were conducted via Zoom with each participant. The interviews took place weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the participants' availability, over the course of several months. Each interview had specific focuses and served as an opportunity to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. Consequently, each interview required both considerable time and thought. By chunking and spacing out the interviews, I avoided overwhelming myself and the participants. I scheduled the interviews with each participant based on their availability shared through a Doodle poll. Once the interviews were scheduled, I sent an email to the participants that detailed the date and time of all three interviews. I also included the Zoom link for the interviews in the email. 48 hours before each interview, I sent the participants an email reminding them of their scheduled interview via Zoom. At the beginning of each Zoom call, but before the start of the actual interview and the recording, the participants were asked if there were any questions that I could answer before we began. I answered all of their questions then reminded the participants of the option to skip any questions that make them uncomfortable and that they could discontinue study participation at any point in the process.

To build rapport and establish comfortability, I began the first interview with questions related to teacher identity (i.e. racial and gender identity, purpose of teaching) and social studies (i.e. approach to teaching). During this interview, I hoped to gain insight into how participants' racial and gender identifications do (or do not) shape their work as teachers. I also hoped to learn more about participants' reasons for teaching in general and their approaches to and experiences with teaching social studies, in particular. The second interview was an artifact-based interview. Participants brought an example of a lesson in which they center race. During this interview, participants talked through the lesson (i.e., decision-making process, instructional materials, dissonance, etc.). The purpose of the second interview was to explore connections between what was said in the first interview and what they actually do in the classroom. This interview served as an opportunity to explore participants' racial identity and feelings regarding how politics shape their work in the classroom. This interview also encouraged participants to discuss their approach to instructional practices. The third and final interview explored participants' reaction to today's sociopolitical climate, as it informs teaching social studies. The full interview protocol can be found as appendices to this chapter.

Each interview was recorded online via Zoom software. Moreover, each recording was (a) downloaded as an .mp3 file; (b) uploaded digitally into electronic folders categorized by participant (pseudonym); and (c) deleted from Zoom software. I used my personal UNC Charlotte Google Drive to store the files. I used electronic software to transcribe each audio file into a text file. These text files were also stored in my personal UNC Charlotte Google Drive.

Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, as noted by Gay et al. (2012):

> The researcher must fully examine each piece of information and, building on insights and hunches gained during data collection, attempt to make sense of the data as a whole.

> Qualitative data analysis is based on induction: The researcher starts with a large set of data representing many things and seeks to narrow them progressively into small and important groups of key data. No predefined variables help to focus analysis, as in quantitative research. The qualitative researcher constructs meaning by identifying patterns and themes that emerge during the data analysis. (p. 466)

With that said, the first step in the analysis of my data involved identifying codes. As defined by Saldaña (2016), "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.4). I conducted two cycles of coding in order to identify themes across the data. The first cycle of coding was to establish codes based on the initial analysis of the data. I did this by identifying (what I believed to be) meaningful key words and/or ideas from each line of the participants' transcripts (although each line did not warrant such). During the second cycle of coding, I themed the data by grouping these words and ideas into larger, overarching themes. Table 1 offers an example of this process.

Table 1

Inquiry

Participant	Interview	Quote
Ida	1	But I really believe in an inquiry-based learning model, because the student gets to find out and break down the information themselves, and then apply it to answering that question.
Viola	3	I think I got two students that are reading the Darity book on Black reparations and it is cool to see a student sitting there with that title of that book there. I cannot imagine if someone took the time to glance and look at that, what their thoughts would be, but, you know, whatever happens happens. But my thing is the impact on those students that are reading that book and how they're going to interpret the understanding of Black history and of themselves.

Table 1

Inquiry Continued

Elizabeth	1	They're on a quest. They're investigators.
Katherine	3	Sometimes they go and do their own exploration.

Essentially, I engaged in thematic analysis, but without an interrater (which, upon reflection, could have enhanced the reliability and validity of the codes that I established). Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). Although there is no clear consensus regarding how to analyze data thematically, Saldaña (2016) argued that it is appropriate for all qualitative studies, especially phenomenology. In this study, thematic analysis was conducted by following steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing myself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; and (5) defining and naming themes. I used NVIVO software to expedite this process. Table 2 shows the data source and methodology I will use to address each research question.

Table 2

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
How do Black female social studies teachers initiate discussions about race and racism with their students given today's political and social context.	Lesson plan(s); Semi-structured interviews	Thematic coding
How do Black female social studies teachers address (e.g. instructional practice, curriculum, and student questions/comments) race, racism, and oppression in their classroom given today's political and social context?	Lesson plan(s); semi-structured interviews	Thematic coding

How do Black female social studies teachers describe their teaching experiences in the context of today's hostile political and social climate?	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic coding

In addition to the preceding, I used member checking, also known as participant validation, as a means to be authentic to the theoretical positions of this study and the participants' experiences and perspectives. Member checking reduces the potential for researcher bias while enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the study results (Mason, 2002). Similar to Shelton and Brooks (2021) in their exploration of risky LGBTQ+ teacher ally work and participant confidentiality, I employed a member checking process characterized by participant-reviewed transcripts. I invited each participant (who took part in the semi-structured interviews) to review her respective transcripts and indicate any edits that needed to be made. In doing so, I aimed to protect the anonymity of the participants and how they are represented in publicly accessible scholarship.

Researcher Positionality

Identity is central to this dissertation study and as a Black woman and former social studies teacher who is seeking to understand the phenomenon (of politicized curriculum trauma), I experienced it through the lens of other Black female social studies teachers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my identity and perspectives are critical to the purpose of this study and influenced how I collected, analyzed, and interpreted data. I understand that this caused some subjectivity and/or bias in my work, but it was long past due for academic research to honor the voices and experiences of Black women. Black women, especially those who teach, play a critical role in shaping the lives (and futures) of students, yet our absence from scholarly investigations perpetuate a narrative that denies our existence and ignores our reality, leaving us vulnerable in ways unbeknownst to our colleagues of a different race and/or gender. Now, more than ever, Black women's stories deserve to be told and from their perspective. As a Black woman and

former social studies teacher, who is also the wife of a Black man and mother of Black children, I was the ideal researcher to take on this task and conduct this study. I have seen and felt, firsthand, the weight and burden of being both a Black woman and Black mother in America. Not a day goes by where I do not feel the unspoken pressure from my husband and children to be Superwoman — to ensure their survival, literally and figuratively — in the face of fatigue, depression, job dissatisfaction, pregnancy loss, and anything else that has the power to break most women, not to mention, men. I do not get a pass or a break, let alone the opportunity to rest, for I am a Black woman and mother. My work is never-ending nor confined to my home or limited to my blood. In every space I occupy, be it the grocery store, trampoline park, gym, or salon, the welfare of Black people, especially Black children, are at the forefront of my mind for I know what they are up against and I want to do everything in my power to prepare them for it. In order to remain attune to subjectivity during data collection and data analysis, I maintained a research journal that details and justifies my thoughts, actions, and feelings throughout the research process. This allowed me to be reflexive and should increase the credibility and readers' understanding of my findings (Berger, 2015).

Limitations to Study

This research was subject to several limitations. First and foremost, as a Black woman, and former social studies teacher, I am considered an insider — a researcher that is a member of the group in which they are studying. Research suggests that being an insider can be advantageous in that an insider has greater understanding of the culture being studied, and thus,

> better able to interpret, critique, and draw appropriate inferences or conclusions about what is observed or learned in a way that an external researcher would have to learn from respondents or from analyzing secondary sources to help verify the accuracy of information. An insider would already understand and draw meaning from the contexts by which phenomena occur relevant to the research problem being investigated. (USC Libraries, 2022, para. 8)

Additionally, because participants may be more likely to be open with a researcher, they perceive to be an "insider" to their experience, they may provide greater access to information and experiences than if they perceive the researcher to be an outsider (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Woods (2019) argued that there is potential for an insider to be too close to the research topic and/or participants, which, in turn will hinder their objectivity and increase bias. To address this limitation and increase the dependability of this study, I fully acknowledge and describe my position and assumptions as an insider within the context of this study, as well as maintained a research journal so I could process the data and research collection experiences and try to acknowledge places where my biases, experiences, and/or identities might be shaping my understanding of the research.

Other limitations to this study include the recruitment methods and the use of convenience sampling. Since participants were recruited via personal connections, it is possible to have recruited participants who think similar to me, which ultimately limits the diversity among Black female social studies teachers and their experiences. The findings from this study are not generalizable and I was limited in terms of implications and conclusions that I could draw due to the preceding, the number of participants, and the amount of information I was able to gather (in three interviews). Lastly, by allowing the participants to handpick a lesson for the artifact-based, second interview, it is possible that the data collected is skewed, and thus, an inaccurate reflection of the participants' teaching practices.

Conclusion

In order to better understand how Black female teachers are experiencing today's sociopolitical climate attacking CRT and racism, this proposed qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to investigate the Black female social studies experience in

the teaching of US history. Data was collected through three semi-structured interviews (with four participants). In the following chapter, I present the findings thematically.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black female social studies teachers teach topics of race, racism, and oppression in today's hostile sociopolitical context. More specifically, this study sought to understand the influence of divisive concepts legislation on the instructional and pedagogical practices of Black women social studies teachers — a group whose experiences are hardly ever explored within the academic space. In doing so, this study not only addresses a gap in the literature, it provides insight into the racialized and gendered ramifications of curriculum censorship, as well as ways in which colleagues, district officials, and other educational stakeholders can meaningfully support and advocate for Black female social studies teachers. Given the potential ramifications of divisive concepts legislation, it is critical that scholars investigate the Black female social studies experience as they engage in the teaching of racialized history at this point in time.

This study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How do Black female social studies teachers initiate discussions about race and racism with their students given today's political and social context? (b) How do Black female social studies teachers address (e.g. instructional practice, curriculum, and responses to student questions/comments) race, racism, and oppression in their classroom given today's political and social context?; and (c) How do Black female social studies teachers describe their teaching experiences in the context of today's hostile political and social climate? Due to the interrelated nature of the research questions, five major themes were identified during the data analysis process — none of which are confined to a particular question. In essence, the themes represent a compelling likeness across the participants' teaching experiences as they navigate divisive concepts legislation. In the next chapter, I draw from these themes to address the research questions.

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study. First, I provide profiles for each participant. I then describe the major themes that I identified across the data — *inquiry*, *cognitive consonance*, *restricting/confining, confronting miseducation/misinformation*, and *conflict* — illuminating each one with participant voice. I conclude each theme with key takeaways that are further explored in the next chapter, in relation to the research questions.

Participant Profiles

At the time of this study, the four Black women who participated were secondary social studies teachers teaching United States history/American history in Texas or North Carolina. They were selected after having been referred as qualified participants by associates within my professional network. In this section, I provide brief narratives about each participant to illustrate their cognizance of and proximity to the research topic. To safeguard their identity, they were each assigned a pseudonym. The pseudonym they were given embodies the persona of influential Black women that I was reminded of as I listened to their thoughts and stories and reflected on their impressions.

Ida

Ida is a 38-year-old Black woman who has spent the past six years working in secondary education, briefly as a district-level teacher development specialist, but mostly as a middle school social studies teacher. Originally from Houston, Texas, Ida received a B.A. in Business Management from Texas Woman's University and a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from Grand Canyon University. Having spent most of her career educating Black and Hispanic students and students from low-income families, when asked why she teaches social studies, Ida replied, “I have taught social studies with the hopes of helping my students build a positive, strong character within themselves. In addition, lead them to becoming active citizens in our

democratic society by developing their understanding of historical content" (January 21, 2023, Interview 1). She went on to state:

> When I look at the content that I'm teaching and the youth that I'm working with, I am really just trying to build well-informed citizens, the ones that are going to be operating what our world looks like in the future. I want them to know how policy is set up, how the government operates. I want them to know how to make decisions. It's important that they are just well-rounded. That's the biggest thing to me because sometimes our kids come in with so many preconceptions or misconceptions and it's my responsibility as a social studies teacher to bring them the facts that they need to be successful as adults. (January 21, 2023, Interview 1)

In exploring other aspects of her work, Ida stressed the importance of teaching historical facts (free from her perspectives), especially given the racial/cultural synchronization between her and her students:

> I have been fortunate that I have actually been teaching students that look like me…My students have been predominantly Brown or Black and when I look at how I am as a teacher, that's one of the first things I do, I have to do a self-check. I have to realize or ask myself; do I have biases already put in place because of, you know, my race? Do I already have these, these prenotions? I have to look at my past experiences and determine if that is going to hinder me from working with my students in a non-biased manner. And so that goes down to me focusing on fact versus opinion. (January 21, 2023, Interview 1)

Despite teaching students who share her racial and/or cultural background, Ida acknowledged that the current context presents a unique set of challenges:

> At times, history has been difficult to teach, not because it is irrelevant, but because of the sensitive nature surrounding topics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and the inequalities faced in both the past and present times. Though student engagement is high, unintended thoughts of sadness, or empathy at times, enter the classroom. (February 11, 2023, Interview 3)

Viola

58-year-old Viola is a native and resident of rural county in North Carolina — a community she describes as overwhelmingly white and conservative, yet also the one in which she teaches. In line with the racial demographics of the area, approximately 60% of students at her school are white, 18% are Black, and 15% are Hispanic. The teaching staff, however, is much more homogenous:

> In my county, I believe, unless someone snuck in while I wasn't watching, I believe I'm the only teacher of Color in the social studies department at the high school level…and then the issue of age because I didn't come in until I was 40, I'm 58 now, I have a tendency to be older than a lot of my colleagues teaching social studies, so that brings in a different perspective because sometimes when I'm talking about history, I'm not talking about things that I did not experience personally. I know this because I was there. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

Viola earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a minor in speech from a private, liberal arts college. She later received a master's degree in liberal studies and a post-baccalaureate certificate in African American studies. After completing a lateral entry program at 40 years-old and obtaining AIG add-on licensure from Duke University, Viola began her career in education while raising three children and going through a divorce — all of which she credits as her

motivation to enter the classroom. When considering her thinking and decision-making as a social studies teacher, she shared that it is centered in her acknowledgement of herself as Black history:

> So even when I'm teaching Holocaust history, I'm teaching Black history because that's who I am, because those stories intersect and mirror so much that for me, for me, as a Black teacher, that's the only way to teach it…There's not going to be not one subject that I don't teach that Blackness doesn't seep in, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether it's centered or off to the side, it is going to be there — and it has to be there. (February 26, 2023, Interview 3)

Despite current attacks on social studies education, Viola's views and feelings about teaching remain rooted in reverence and reflect Black women's historical legacy of perseverance and responsibility:

> To be honest, with the history of my ancestors, it is probably nothing that I have not heard before. Not that I want to expose myself to undue trauma, neither do I want not to acknowledge the truth of the past and present. If they (my Ancestors) took it and endured, I surely can, and I owe it to give that strength to my daughters, son-in-law, grandchildren, and students. (February 26, 2023, Interview 3)

After almost 20 years in the classroom, Viola looks forward to leaving soon as there are other ways she wants to teach. In reflecting on the legacy, she wants to leave behind, she stated:

> So, as I was thinking of the ending of my career, what impact do I want to leave? And one of the things I want to do is, I want to see more Black people, Black and Brown people, I want to see more teachers of Color in the classroom, but we have to get them to

> want to be in the classroom, and we have to get it so that they're not fighting these fights. (February 26, 2023, Interview 3)

Elizabeth

Born and raised in North Carolina, Elizabeth, who is in her 60s, has spent the past 20 years teaching high school social studies in one of the state's largest school districts. Additionally, since 2017, she has served as an adjunct professor in the Department of History and Political Science at her alma mater — a top-ranking HBCU. Having earned a B.A. in Political Science and a M.S. in Secondary History Education, Elizabeth entered the field of education after fourteen years as a congressional caseworker for a U.S. congressman. When asked to describe her approach to teaching social studies, Elizabeth referenced a quote from her bulletin board: "Historians are investigators. Historians examine evidence to determine or interpret an event." In her opinion, social studies serves as a conduit for students to explore and understand historical events from multiple perspectives — perspectives that she easily integrates into instruction given her racial identity:

> I know that my racial identity being African American affords me the opportunity to always be aware of different perspectives, particularly those who are marginalized, particularly those who don't necessarily have a voice in terms of documents, primary source documents, and having had their histories recorded. So that gives me a special understanding of the need to make sure that every voice is heard, every perspective is presented, so that students will get the full story of what happened with an event. (January 29, 2023, Interview 3)

Elizabeth's teaching philosophy, deeply influenced by her racial identity and experiences of "otherness," emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and representation in history education.

Being African American, she possesses a heightened awareness of marginalized perspectives, especially those historically overlooked or silenced in mainstream narratives. This unique standpoint enables her to enrich her social studies curriculum with diverse viewpoints, ensuring her students gain a comprehensive understanding of historical events. Elizabeth's approach reflects a commitment to presenting history in a way that acknowledges and values the contributions and experiences of all people, fostering a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the past among her students.

Katherine

Originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, 30-year-old Katherine currently lives and teaches in a metropolitan area in Texas. She completed both her bachelor's degree and master's degree in history at a popular HBCU nearby, and after receiving her teaching license via an alternative certification program (ACP), Katherine began teaching high school social studies in a large urban school district. With seven years of her own teaching experience, she proudly shared that she comes from a long line of educators:

> My upbringing afforded me the opportunity to be surrounded by educators. My maternal grandparents, as well as both of my parents, were all teachers. I was always taught to seek information and value education. In addition, being born and raised in New Orleans, I value rich culture and history. I believe these two pieces were instrumental in cultivating my value of all things encompassing the African Diaspora. (February 12, 2023, Interview 1)

Fueled by her family's legacy of teaching and the historic culture of her hometown, Katherine expressed a deep commitment to educating Black and Brown students as she admitted to only teaching in minority-dominant schools (by choice). As social studies education continues to be

politicized, she hopes that students are fueled to question and analyze everything for she believes that “those who don’t know their history are bound to repeat it ” (March 12, 2023, Interview 3).

Themes

Five major themes were identified during the data analysis process. The themes illustrate the enmeshed reality of today’s Black female social studies teachers as they attempt to navigate the politicization of their field and remain true to their work and themselves. The themes are as follows: *inquiry*, *cognitive consonance*, *restricting/confining*, *confronting miseducation/misinformation*, and *conflict*. All five themes are intertwined, impacting each other to some degree. They are outlined and detailed in the discussion below.

Inquiry

The most prevalent theme that emerged from the data is *inquiry*. In the realm of social studies education, inquiry refers to “a set of interlocking and reinforcing dimensions that move from developing questions and planning inquiries to communicating conclusions and taking informed action” (Swan et al., 2023, p. 367). Unlike traditional methods of social studies instruction (which are often characterized by lectures and the memorization of facts), inquiry-based social studies combines the art of questioning with that of exploration, allowing students to develop their own understandings rather than regurgitate those of their teacher or textbook. Inquiry is the most accepted “best practice” in social studies (Pugh, 2023), but in this particular study, inquiry has a more culturally, racially rich meaning. In the context of this study, inquiry is understood as participants’ way of addressing their teaching environment and the contested nature of social studies content. While their general notions of inquiry may align with

Swan, Lee, and Grant (2023), their motives to use it do not, representing a perspective distinct from that of other social studies teachers.

Inquiry is a process of discovering, exploring. Participants agree that it is the most effective means for students to engage with topics of race, racism, and oppression. Thus, all four participants referenced inquiry, or a facet thereof, when reflecting on their role in educating students about these topics. In particular, they mentioned using questions to steer the inquiry process and maintain a focus on race throughout readings, writings, and discussions. For example, when teaching about the women's movement, Ida assigns various primary sources and tasks that enable students to craft a written response to thought-provoking (race-based) questions such as: How were Black women heard during the 1920s? Similarly, Viola described structuring a lesson on nationalism and immigration around the question: Who gets to be an American? These examples illustrate participants' use of inquiry-based questioning to engage students with the concepts of race and racism, while also protecting themselves from groundless claims of indoctrination (that direct instruction alludes to).

Guided inquiry and open inquiry represent two distinct approaches within the pedagogical method known as inquiry-based learning, which emphasizes the learner's active role in their educational journey through questioning, exploration, and assessment. The primary difference between these approaches lies in the degree of instructor guidance and student freedom. Guided inquiry is characterized by a significant level of structure and support from the instructor, who leads the learners by providing a clear problem or question and outlining a specific process for investigation. This method includes structured frameworks, substantial teacher support through scaffolding, and a focus on achieving predefined learning objectives.

Guided inquiry is Viola's go-to method for conducting explorations. During her first interview, she illustrated how she uses guided inquiry to identify and address students' misunderstandings and misconceptions about race-related topics:

> There's a current event every week that deals with a particular part of the Constitution…So week one was freedom of speech. Week two, we did the right to privacy, Fourth Amendment, and this week we're gonna do the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms. And each of those conversations — race, oppression, denial of rights, joy, pain, all of that, to some marginalized group will be expressed. I know when we did the first one, freedom of speech, one of the first things that I brought to my classes' attention was the controversy over the Little Mermaid being Black, and how that was tied to freedom of speech and why it was an issue. And at that time, we were doing a lesson where we were playing a game and they got a chance to not only express what they thought about it, but they got to hear what their peers thought about it. And they had the opportunity to change their mind during any of the discussion because one of the images on my slide is of the KKK dress, but another slide had the "Make America Great Again" hat and that one probably had the longest discussion because the Court had just ruled that this teacher could wear this hat in school. And so, the question was, do you agree, disagree, strongly agree, and so we're talking about that. So, then my question to them was, what was the difference between that hat and your response when I showed you the KKK dress? And so, then they had a discussion in it and in all of this, I'm not saying what I think, I'm just asking the questions and letting them try to process the information, but it's things that they probably have never thought about as tenth graders, as fifteen-year-olds, not deeply. They knew what the KKK was, they knew about the red hat,

> but they never thought about that in conjunction with freedom of speech and how all of that's going to play out and how students of Color saw that differently than others…They actually got to see that and got to hear why certain ones thought that was the same thing as the KKK while others didn't, and it was just meant for them to just start thinking. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

Discussion is perhaps the most dynamic element of learning about race, racism, and oppression in social studies. It provides a forum for students to voice their thoughts, ask questions, and engage in dialogue with their peers and teachers. Discussions can facilitate the exchange of ideas, challenge assumptions, and foster a classroom environment where diverse viewpoints are heard and respected. Through guided inquiry, teachers facilitate guided discussions, which, in turn, can help students navigate the complexities of these topics, address misconceptions, and encourage empathy and understanding among students from different backgrounds. Furthermore, discussions promote the development of critical listening and speaking skills, as students learn to articulate their views clearly and respond thoughtfully to the opinions of others.

Open inquiry grants learners much more autonomy than guided inquiry, allowing them to generate their own investigative questions based on personal interests, decide on their investigative methods, and manage their projects independently. This approach demands a high level of self-motivation and adaptability from students, with the teacher's role shifting to facilitating resource access and offering support as needed rather than directing the inquiry process. Both Elizabeth and Ida use open inquiry to teach social studies. As she reflected on her pedagogy, Elizabeth alluded to her use of this approach:

> When we start talking about racism, when we start talking about those tools that were used to subjugate, gate, and to oppress, my approach to teaching is to give them resources

> so that they can explore it themselves and come to their own understanding. I rarely ever give my opinion and I have been that way from the beginning. (January 29, 2023, Interview 1)

As a trained historian (with a background in politics), Elizabeth teaches about race, racism, and oppression using resources that support an objective approach to historical inquiry and allow for independent student exploration. Throughout each interview, she made it clear that she never gives her opinion, emphasizing the importance of students constructing their own knowledge and understandings when engaging with these topics. Elizabeth's use of this approach could be related to her guarded nature or it could serve as a means of self-protection, given that she is a Black woman teaching white students (about race). This sentiment is captured in the deliberateness of her pedagogical decisions:

> One of the first things I do is start with Africa. We start with the African kingdoms and we really examine the different types of slavery, whether we're talking about the trans-Saharan slave trade, the Indian Ocean slave trade, or the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They do analysis, or compare the slave trades. They look at how the structures of slavery differed…We look at the development of chattel slavery and we know that the development of chattel slavery really was what helped create racism. So they examine that and then they look at some of the statutes that were passed by the House of Burgesses, which legislated things that Africans could and could not do because we know those first 20-30 Africans who came to Jamestown, Virginia, were not classified as being enslaved as there was no slavery on the books. By looking at those documents, they discover for themselves the development of slavery based on race and the development of

> racism. They have an opportunity to write about it, to talk about it, and as we move through the course, they can identify patterns with the changing culture.

To start with Africa is an intentional choice and an important one, especially when teaching about race in social studies. As a Black female social studies teacher, Elizabeth's decision to begin with the history of Africa when teaching about race reflects a complex interplay of personal experience, professional commitment to inclusivity, and a nuanced understanding of the educational impact of representation.

Like Elizabeth, Ida uses open inquiry. This approach allows her to educate students about race and racism without having her pain and biases intercede:

> So when I'm teaching my students, I ask them questions to bring discussion, but I never put my pain in it. So for me, though there were things I've seen growing up, I don't let it go into my planning or how I address my students in the classroom. (January 21, 2023, Interview 1)

As she reflected on the strategies, she employs to effectively teach these concepts, Ida referenced open inquiry once again:

> When I'm going into those heavy topics — anything related to race — I like to do the inquiry-design model…I like introducing information like this because it requires them to go in and discover and unearth information. I'm not presenting my opinion. They are forming their own thoughts. (February 4, 2023, Interview 2)

Through open inquiry, Ida fosters an environment that encourages critical thinking and questioning of historical narratives and present-day inequalities. This not only educates her students on important historical and contemporary issues, it equips them with the analytical tools to navigate and challenge societal norms and injustices.

The choice between guided and open inquiry depends on various factors, including the learners' age, experience with inquiry-based learning, and the educational objectives at hand. While guided inquiry offers a structured environment conducive to achieving specific learning outcomes and may be more suitable for younger or less experienced learners, open inquiry provides a platform for more advanced learners to engage deeply with subjects that interest them, fostering independence and critical thinking skills. In practice, educators often blend elements of both approaches to tailor the learning experience to their students' needs, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment that encourages curiosity and a love of learning.

The utilization of inquiry-based learning in social studies, especially in the context of teaching about race, racism, and oppression, plays a pivotal role in enabling students to engage deeply with these critical issues. This educational approach emphasizes critical thinking and analysis, requiring students to scrutinize diverse sources, recognize biases, and evaluate multiple perspectives. Such analytical skills are indispensable when delving into the complex nature of racism and its entrenchment in societal structures. Inquiry-based learning also enhances empathy and understanding by encouraging exploration of personal narratives and experiences related to racial oppression, thereby humanizing the individuals affected and challenging existing stereotypes and prejudices.

Central to the inquiry process is the engagement with intricate questions that often lack straightforward answers, pushing students to acknowledge the complexity of race-related issues, including their historical foundations and present-day realities. This method fosters an openness to difficult discussions and a readiness to consider different viewpoints. Furthermore, inquiry-based learning aims to cultivate informed citizens who are not only aware of the societal impacts of racism, but are also prepared to advocate for equity and justice. By actively involving

students in their learning journey, this approach motivates them to research, question, and participate in meaningful debates, thus challenging their preconceptions and broadening their perspectives.

Moreover, inquiry in social studies offers students a chance to reflect on personal and societal values, prompting them to examine their own beliefs and the societal norms surrounding race and racism. This reflective practice encourages students to contemplate their role within society and the necessary actions to promote change towards greater justice and equality. In essence, the inquiry-based approach in social studies concerning race, racism, and oppression not only deepens students' understanding of these pivotal issues, but also empowers them to contribute actively to the fight against racism and to work towards a more inclusive society.

Cognitive Consonance

The second major theme identified from the data is *cognitive consonance*. In the context of this study, cognitive consonance refers to consistency between participants' beliefs and their instructional practices, despite political (and subsequent) pressures to censor teaching related to race, racism, and oppression. Throughout the interview process, all four participants exhibited cognitive consonance. When reflecting on their thoughts and classroom experiences, it was evident that participants' pedagogical decisions are shaped by their sense of purpose and responsibility as Black women social studies teachers. Katherine, for example, expressed a professional, yet deeply personal, profound sense of obligation to teach about race, racism, and oppression, particularly as she described her curricular choice to teach these topics (often through counternarratives):

> I don't think I feel pressure, but I do think I'm obligated. I think I would be remiss if I didn't offer these students this level of a well-rounded education. I feel like, you know, I

> was raised by Black educators and some of these things I didn't even realize were not being taught because in my household they were discussed, but they weren't common knowledge in other people's households. Like, I knew the things that my family had participated in — my grandmother was a part of sit-ins in New Orleans, my great aunt helped integrate schools in New Orleans — things like that. So, I didn't realize because Louisiana, you know, is very Black and white, I understood what racism was, but I didn't realize that it was necessarily something I was supposed to be taught in school. I thought that was something people got at home, but then I realized that a lot of people aren't getting it at home. So I was like, well, you know, these children need to know. (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

Given the Eurocentric and sanitized versions of history presented in standard curricula alongside personal and community experiences with race, racism, and oppression, Katherine exercises a unique motivation and perspective needed to correct these narratives while also helping children know and confront the realities of racism. This effort to provide a more accurate and inclusive history aligns with her personal commitment to truth and justice, fostering cognitive consonance by ensuring that her teaching practices reflect her life, her history, and her values.

Determined to disrupt Black students' misconceptions about the Black past, Ida echoed a similar sense of responsibility to teach about race, racism, and oppression. However, unlike Katherine, who is driven by the lived experiences of her family and self, Ida's sense of responsibility appears to stem from the authority she possesses as a Black woman teacher — an academic othermother working on behalf of the Black community:

> So, when I think about this, I think about the students are with us a majority of the day and then if they are at home, maybe their parents aren't qualified — I don't want to say

> not qualified, but they do not have as much understanding. This is something that we've studied. This is something that we went to school for. This is something we've invested time in and so I feel like we're better equipped to be able to address those issues of race. Now I do understand that there might be some that are uncomfortable, and that, that should be normal though. We should not, of course, bring blank to them exactly, but we're just teaching the history. So I think when you're clear with students, and you're answering every question that they have, and you're addressing any feelings that they may have, making sure that we are not trying to attempt to make you feel uncomfortable. We're just introducing history as it took place and keeping it as simple as that. But I do believe that we as teachers, that is our responsibility because our students are with us and they trust us, or they should trust us, to give them the information that they need and the content that they need to understand. (January 21, 2023, Interview 1)

Ida not only recognizes her duty and influence; she understands the limits of cultural/historical perspectives of those not formally trained as an educator. For this reason, she does more than teach history — she *reveals* a history that family, parents, and their children do not know, yet entrust her to teach. Though this history can be emotionally taxing and challenging for both Ida and her students, like other participants in this study, her instructional practices stay true to her beliefs even in today's contentious times.

Like her peers, Viola also expressed a sense of responsibility to teach topics of race. However, she alone voiced a willingness to bear the extra stress and workload required to do so, for in her eyes, education is personal, and her responsibilities as a Black woman teacher are both critical and familial:

> I think my responsibility to my students, to all of my students, is to provide the best educational experience possible. That doesn't mean that I come in perfect every day. I want to give my students the kind of education that I hope my daughters got, which means that their teacher came in to not only push them academically, but to also support them. And also, my daughters grew up understanding and knowing and experiencing Black history because of me and because they're Black and that is gonna be part of the process in my classroom. We're going to intentionally do Black history — incorporate it with everything else that I do. And it's not to shock, it is not to condemn, it is — this is what we're going to learn at this moment in time, that it should feel like a natural flow, that you should know these things, you should know these people, you should know this music. It just becomes like, you know, that George Washington was the first president. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

While Viola is speaking of her daughters, she is doing so metaphorically. In actuality, she is acknowledging her use of Black feminist pedagogy, particularly othermothering, as a tool for teaching about race, racism, and oppression. Furthermore, given her adamance and intentionality in centering Black history, Viola is (a) acting on her need to teach the unknown, (b) challenging master narratives, and (c) drawing on her identity to shape pedagogical decisions. She explained:

> I teach civics, American history, economics, and personal finance. I teach those as a Black female in the south. And I teach that knowing that my everyday existence impacts everything. So I teach from that perspective. So the only way that I could take race out of how I teach is not to be who I am. (February 26, 2023, Interview 3)

Viola's approach not only enriches the curriculum, it empowers her students with a more comprehensive understanding of history. Her pedagogical decisions, deeply intertwined with her

identity and experiences as a Black woman, allow her to confront and subvert systemic biases in education, advocating for a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of historical events. Through this, Viola demonstrates how educators can utilize their unique perspectives to foster a more equitable and truthful educational environment.

Moreover, this convergence of identity and content she alludes to is accentuated when she states, “I’m gonna teach what I need to teach and if they don’t want me to teach it then fire me” (February 26, 2023, Interview 3). Viola’s convergence of identity and her views on cognitive dissonance highlight her deep understanding of the complex dynamics between personal identity and educational content. She recognizes the conflict that arises when educators’ personal beliefs or identities clash with the material they are expected to teach, especially around sensitive topics like race. By choosing to teach in a way that is true to her identity as a Black woman, Viola is addressing and navigating this dissonance, asserting the importance of authenticity in teaching practices and the value of diverse perspectives in education. Though articulated by Viola, this notion is one that resonates with the other participants in this study. Additionally, it calls into question cognitive dissonance, or the fear among white teachers to authentically honor the identity and experiences of Black people in the teaching of social studies. For the Black teachers in this study, cognitive dissonance arises when navigating predominantly white spaces (e.g. required curriculum and standards, textbooks, mandated resources, etc.), educational systems, and/or the actors that often marginalize or negate Black experiences and histories. In contrast, white cognitive dissonance is characterized by a fear to confront the realities of privilege and systemic racism which challenge white teachers to question learned beliefs about curriculum, history, equality, and meritocracy.

Cognitive consonance in these Black women social studies teachers stems from a deep-seated commitment to imparting an education that honestly addresses race, racism, and oppression. This commitment is not just academic; it is personal, rooted in their own experiences and those of their communities. It is further amplified by a sense of duty towards motherwork or othermothering, nurturing not only academic growth, but also critical consciousness in their students. This profound sense of purpose, coupled with an understanding of historical omissions and the courage to address them without fear of backlash, embodies the ultimate display of cognitive consonance.

Restricting/Confining

The third theme is *restricting/confining*. This theme describes participants' thoughts and feelings regarding their teaching experiences in today's hostile sociopolitical climate. Although all four participants acknowledged that they *feel* restricted (to some degree) in their teaching, they do not restrict what it is that they teach, but rather are more conscious of it. Ida, for instance, shared the following:

> I do this thing called; I'm stepping…I'm stepping into my different teacher box. So it's like, okay, I'm teaching you what you're supposed to learn here, but then I step out, and that's when we have those real conversations. So I don't put certain things in my lesson plans because, you know, I don't want them tracking or walking in and having any concern, but I still teach those things, even if it's just like a short conversation or if it's like a quick little guided practice activity, or an extension activity, or a homework assignment. I'm trying to find different ways to follow the agenda that I want to follow, which is making sure my students are well-rounded in their understanding of history from an ethnic studies point of view. So like right now, I'm in an ethnic studies program and in

> that program the books that we're reading, the history of Texas that we're learning about, the violence that took place with migrant workers, like I'm introducing that to my students, and right now, especially my Hispanic students, they're like, "Wow!" They didn't know how much violence was taking place at the border, you know, after the US-Mexican War. So, it's like, I'm still finding ways to introduce it, but I just can't make it so loud. I have to do it quietly. (February 4, 2023, Interview 2)

Ida's statement about teaching Texas history "quietly" reflects a strategic and thoughtful approach to "violence" "at the border" under challenging circumstances. It highlights her commitment to educating students on these vital issues while navigating the complex dynamics of political, social, and educational constraints. This approach underscores the creativity, resilience, and dedication of a teacher working to enrich her students' understanding of history and society in environments that may not always be supportive of open dialogue on these critical topics.

Her strategy of keeping the discussion "quiet" may also reflect a sense of personal and professional caution. As a Black woman teacher, she may feel the need to tread carefully when discussing race to avoid professional repercussions or personal conflicts within the school or community. Ida's approach suggests an awareness of these risks and a deliberate effort to balance her educational goals with the need for job security and community respect.

Moreover, given that she teaches in Texas, this notion of "quiet teaching" could be attributed to state laws, school district policies, and/or community attitudes that limit how race, racism, and oppression can be addressed. Ida's approach to "do it quietly" suggests a careful navigation of these sensitivities to ensure that essential discussions are still happening without provoking backlash that could jeopardize her position or the learning environment.

Though Katherine teaches in Texas, too, her feelings of constraint differ from Ida's as her feelings stem from the curriculum's selective portrayal of U.S. historical events and the removal of books that question this portrayal:

> In today's climate, they're banning so many books. So like, we usually have really good books in our school library and just last year they had employees from the district come in and basically clean out our library, take a lot of books, box them up, and ship them out, and they replaced them with things that are fictional and you know, just not really good primary sources. So they're removing and banning a lot of materials in Texas as a state and then even in [school district] as a district that, in my opinion, really did give students like a well-rounded perspective of, you know, a lot of the events that took place throughout history as it relates to race and African diasporic studies…(March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

Katherine's experience with the selective portrayal of U.S. historical events and book bans in Texas highlights the tension between master narratives and U.S. historical memory. Master narratives often simplify complex histories, prioritizing certain perspectives while marginalizing others. Considering that master narratives are reinforced through censorship efforts such as book bans and divisive concepts legislation, Katherine describes social studies education in today's teaching context not only as restrictive, but hypocritical, especially in how it depicts issues of race, colonialism, and oppression:

> I think that it is hypocritical because as a US history teacher, I can tell you that America teaches "anti" on so many things that they disagree with, you know. When we teach colonialism in America, we don't teach that it's a bad thing. We teach that we were expanding the nation, but we don't teach necessarily that we murdered and killed

> thousands of people and that people's cultures were completely erased. So I find it very interesting that we find it problematic to speak that critical race theory is so damaging, but then we will only paint the nicer side of things that we've done as a country that were very damaging. You talk about the Native Americans, or even when we teach world history, we talk about colonialism was Europe and all the European countries, Spain and France, and you know, Great Britain, going to all these different countries and implementing, or imposing I should say, their religious beliefs, their political beliefs, and so on and so forth on other groups. I think the only reason that we don't like, quote unquote, critical race theory, is because it paints whites out to be the villain and they're, you know, the majority, and not necessarily the population majority, but obviously the economic, social, and political majority in this country. (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

Expanding upon the preceding, she added:

> Why is the truth such a bad thing? Why don't we want truth and honesty? You know, in our, in our systems, we supposedly thrive off of truth and freedom…However, when it comes to just having a discussion about things that have actually happened, that are documented and proven to happen, we're so concerned about them being detrimental. We don't want our children to be indoctrinated by this harmful critical race theory, which is literally just, you know, regurgitating facts…But there are a lot of things that are uncomfortable that are necessary, you know. The Presidential Fitness Test where kids have to walk a mile around the track is uncomfortable, but it's still something we require them to do. Getting vaccinations to go to school isn't comfortable, well, we still require children to do it, you know…We can't pick and choose comfortability because there are a lot of things that are uncomfortable, you know. We talk about the Holocaust and are we

> concerned about how it makes children of German descent feel? We talk about communism and the spread of communism and how it was such a bad thing. Are we concerned about how it makes children of Russian descent feel? So why can't we talk about slavery or critical race theory because it may make white students uncomfortable? (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

Katherine's statements highlight her perceptions of a significant discrepancy in how U.S. history and social studies are taught (in general), particularly around issues of race, colonialism, and oppression. She points out the hypocrisy in the educational system's selective portrayal of historical events where expansion and colonialism are taught without adequately addressing the accompanying violence, cultural erasure, and oppression of Indigenous peoples and other cultures. This selective narrative extends to the reluctance to incorporate critical discussions on race, such as those offered by CRT, which are avoided for fear of painting white Americans in a negative light.

Her quotes question why truth and honesty in teaching history are seen as detrimental, especially when other uncomfortable truths or challenging subjects are not shied away from in education. These points argue for the necessity of confronting uncomfortable historical truths, akin to other uncomfortable, but necessary aspects of education, emphasizing that discomfort should not be a barrier to learning (and it should not be just the work of teachers of Color or more specifically, Black female teachers). Katherine challenges the inconsistency in the willingness of other social studies teachers to discuss certain historical atrocities, like the Holocaust or communism, without the same apprehension that surrounds discussions on slavery and race, underscoring a broader issue of selective comfort in confronting America's racial

history and its implications for teaching and understanding history comprehensively and truthfully.

Even with laws in place to limit the teaching of race, racism, and oppression, Viola is not restricted or constrained. She is, however, both frustrated and overwhelmed by the additional work she does (in the wake of such legislation) to ensure the accuracy of the information/content she teaches:

> It's made it harder, and not harder, that I'm gonna take anything out, I'm not. That's not, that's not gonna happen. It's made it harder because I have to check and recheck my work, even when I know that I'm right, even when I was like, I know this information, I know this, you know. I'm going back to check it just to make sure that I've crossed all the T's and dotted all the I's with the information that I'm bringing. So that in itself, it's just more work. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

Ida admitted to similar feelings as she stated:

> When I look at the standards and how they're spread out, I've realized how much additional work I've had to put into how I plan. So, I may be teaching a standard, but I'm still trying to tie in women's history, trying to tie in more of, you know, the history of African Americans, and the standards, the way they are spread out for eighth grade, it tries to, it's so many standards that it tries to keep you from tying those things in. It tries to make it to where you don't have enough time it seems like. (January 21, 2023, Interview 1)

Whether Ida and Viola feel the need to work harder because of their cultural background, the nature of today's political climate, or a combination of both, they have not acquiesced to

legislative mandates because racialized history is too important for them not to teach, and thus, they are willing to work harder to authentically teach it.

Due to educational gag orders, these Black women social studies teachers often feel restricted or constrained when teaching topics related to race, racism, and oppression. However, despite these feelings, they continue to teach against the grain, though with caution. While this approach may require them to work harder, it also allows them to fulfill their duty in providing an honest history education.

Confronting Miseducation/Misinformation

Confronting miseducation/misinformation refers to the strategies, or ways in which participants build factual knowledge — "fighting power" — in the battle against the politicization of social studies. Moreover, it signifies the deliberate efforts and unwavering commitment of these Black women social studies teachers in their endeavors to empower themselves and their students through accurate knowledge. When considering contemporary attacks on Black history, Elizabeth, for example, shared the following:

> When I first came to [school name] high school, Mr. [teacher name] was teaching African American history and he stopped teaching it and I wanted to really bring it back, so for three years I volunteered my planning period to teach African American history at this school…Right after the murder of George Floyd, I had a friend of mine who teaches in Maryland to reach out to me and some other people and said, "Hey, we've got to start developing some African American courses because there's a demand by Black people who want to know about African American history." There's a great demand. And if you look at that demand, if you look at the demographic kind of profile of the average student that's in public school in North Carolina, it's a person of Color…So who are we

> teaching? Who are we teaching? What does the average student look like in some of these states? And maybe that's the whole purpose is to deflect from them? And what are their parents demanding? I can tell you. I had two sections of African American studies this semester at my high school. I had two last semesters. Before that, I've only had one. The demand is there. African Americans want to know about African American history and I don't see that changing. (January 29, 2023, Interview 1)

Elizabeth's statement suggests that Black students and their families seek an education that truthfully portrays Black histories, emphasizing their humanity — a need Elizabeth found lacking in her own educational experiences. This desire confronts ongoing political efforts to erase such narratives, viewed as attempts to uphold existing power structures and preserve the status quo. Recognizing education as a pivotal battleground for challenging these silences, it becomes clear that continuing with a whitewashed version of history does a disservice to all students, particularly those of Color. By striving to present a curriculum that mirrors their diverse realities, Elizabeth aims to dismantle the centrality of whiteness, ensuring students see their own reflections in the stories they learn:

> Let me start by saying that I'm in my 60s and I remember sitting in high school, in history class in particular, and hearing students giggle and laugh at Black people that were on the film. I remember that feeling. I remember being angry. I didn't know who to direct my anger at at the time because I was angry. I wasn't humiliated. I wasn't embarrassed. I wasn't humiliated because thank goodness I had parents where they were activists and they were educators, and so I wasn't humiliated. I was just angry. I was angry because of the way that African Americans and Africans were being depicted as if

> they were subhuman. So I bring that up because I don't want any student in my classroom to feel bad. (January 29, 2023, Interview 1)

In recognizing her own experiences, Elizabeth is driven to ensure her students are equipped with knowledge that is both incontrovertible and empowering, enabling them to challenge misinformation and miseducation. By prioritizing the voices and experiences of Black people and confronting singular narratives, she not only fosters a sense of racial uplift, she contributes significantly to the broader struggle for accurate representation in education. This approach underscores her commitment to fulfilling her duties as an educator and advocate within the Black community.

Given the cultural history of her hometown and the community experiences of her family, Katherine recognizes the importance of first-hand accounts in providing students with a comprehensive and accurate history:

> One of the number one thing that I really like to do is allow students to listen to live interviews…I took a course that was centered around historiography, the history of history, and then recording history. And one thing that I did was I focused on Jim Crow in New Orleans as like one of my final projects. And so I let them listen to those interviews, also interviews that I did of veterans, African American veterans and their treatment. And so I like to let the students listen to this because these are real people who at the time I was doing these interviews were still living and so it allows them to get first-hand accounts from people of Color, specifically Black people. (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

Katherine not only honors the voices and experiences of Black people by allowing them to narrate their own stories, she significantly enriches her students' understanding. By incorporating live interviews and firsthand accounts into her curriculum, she challenges mainstream social

studies narratives, prompting her students to critically engage with the material. This method questions the selective authenticity often portrayed in educational materials, which traditionally align with America's mythological self-perception, thus empowering students to confront and dismantle miseducation and misinformation. Moreover, it illustrates the power of knowledge, the power in knowing history — true history, Black history. As such, Katherine views educational gag orders as nuanced efforts to continue the historical miseducation of marginalized groups, thereby preserving the white power structure:

> I think that education has become so monetized and so politicized that they are afraid of emboldening newer generations with the knowledge that's readily available, because they know they're gonna fight systemic oppression of racial groups, of gender groups, of sexualities, of religions. And as a country, we preach freedoms in all of these spaces, but then when you talk about what we're preaching versus what we're actually practicing, it's a completely different thing…America is filled with hypocrisy and we all, well, I'm not gonna say we all know, but I will assert that, from my perspective, just from being well read, and even experience, you know, white men dominate America, and anything that jeopardizes their stronghold of power in this country will always be seen as a threat, it must be obliterated. (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

As a Black woman, Katherine has a vantage point in understanding racial power dynamics, especially within educational settings. Her statement implies that the manipulation of historical narratives serves as a tool to inscribe power and dominance, particularly over Black people. Through divisive concepts legislation, educative-psychic violence is inflicted upon Black students and other students of Color, as these laws perpetuate miseducation and misinformation, eliminating students' access to an honest, comprehensive history education. However, as

previously noted, Katherine incorporates oral histories to confront this educational injustice and provide students with a more accurate understanding of history.

In knowing she is teaching what is right, Viola is empowered by knowledge to combat miseducation and misinformation. Like other participants in this study, such as Ida, who frequently attends summer institutes and is currently enrolled in an ethnic studies program, Viola builds "fighting power," or historical knowledge, through various means. Take, for example, her participation in history projects sponsored by the National Council on History Education or her membership in a national social studies book club that focuses on texts that accurately and sensitively depict the experiences of ethnic minorities. Through these avenues, she gains knowledge, and thus, the ability to challenge both historical inaccuracies and misleading information fearlessly. As a result, any attempt to miseducate or misinform students, whether intentional or not, is curbed:

> In my classroom, again, I go with this caveat. If you're gonna bring up something, you have to have the evidence to support what you're going to say. Because you have this opinion, that's fine, but that's not what my class is. If you're going to bring up the subject then where's your proof or your evidence that this actually is? And don't say, "Well, you know, that's what I've always heard." That's not, that's not good enough because this is a history class and it's based on evidence and proof and support. So, if you don't have that then you keep it to yourself until you can get that evidence, proof, and support to bring that up into the classroom. And I will shut it down. If someone's going down, I'm like no, I will stop them because if you say the wrong stuff then that's what my students have heard, and then me trying to correct an incorrect statement is going to be harder. So yes,

> if I, I will, I will. I will stop them if they're going that way. No, we're not doing that. You're not going to finish that statement. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

As her statement indicates, Viola confronts miseducation and misinformation propagated not only by mainstream social studies curriculum, but by students, too. In doing so, she suggests that (a) knowledge-building is more difficult when students communicate misinformation, and that (b) the dissemination of false information bears significant ramifications, especially when it relates to sensitive topics such as race, racism, and oppression. In recognition of the preceding, Viola alludes to the professional harm caused, particularly to the psyche of Black students, when teachers fail to address misinformation or arm themselves with accurate historical knowledge. As such, she voiced her expectations for other teachers, mainly white social studies teachers, who may need to build or deepen their knowledge of Black history in order to decenter whiteness and disrupt half-truths and/or lies they might unknowingly perpetuate in their instruction:

> And I preface that with the fact that I am 58. I am divorced. I don't have children at home. So other than this dog that I have to keep until May, you know, my time is my time…So I know that that's a luxury that a lot of teachers don't have and I understand that, but as I tell teachers, you can introduce one thing, bring in one, learn it, bring it in. You don't have to bring in the whole Black encyclopedia of history into your classroom, but you can make one change, you can study one book. Do that each semester then build upon that. But in order to, to teach this history, you have to know this history and that means studying. Go to the webinars, go to the conference, pick up the book, look at the documentary. Do not go and pull a lesson plan and teach it without putting it in that context of knowing what you're teaching. So it does take time and I understand that that's a luxury that a lot of teachers don't have, especially if they have a family and I totally get

> it, but it doesn't excuse the practice. You can read one book a semester on Black history, you can watch one documentary, go to one webinar, and then incorporate that intentionally into your classroom and then the next semester do the same thing. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

While Viola's statement acknowledges the importance of building Black historical knowledge, in essence, it is a call to action. It is a plea to social studies educators, specifically those that are white, to prioritize the teaching and inclusion of Black history. By doing so, they can address misinformation or incomplete narratives, and thus, better serve Black children.

As legislative restrictions attempt to limit teaching about race, racism, and oppression, the participants in this study have taken on a significant role in challenging miseducation and misinformation surrounding these topics, as well as Black history. Accordingly, they are critical in empowering students with knowledge that subverts historical inaccuracies and monolithic narratives about the Black past. This, in turn, enables students to engage in meaningful discourse about race and racism.

Conflict

The fifth and final theme is *conflict*. Conflict refers to contention between participants and their colleagues, administrators, students, and/or school community due to race-related instruction. In the context of this study, it is a racialized concept, characterized by the value attributed to Black women within a community. As such, this indicates that the context in which these Black women teach moderates the power of their voices and perspectives of what should be taught. This also notes the role of administrators in listening to the experiences and intellectual wisdom of the participants.

Elizabeth and Viola, who do not teach in majority-minority schools, attribute their experiences with conflict to the lack of racial and cultural synchronization between themselves and other members of their school community. During her first interview, Elizabeth, who is the sole Black woman in her school's social studies department, recalled being pressured by a coworker to discuss how they would operate the piloting of AP African American Studies following Florida's rejection of the course. Despite her refusal to engage in said discourse (due to its political undertones), Elizabeth, unlike her colleague, remained committed to teaching the content. This incident is a testament to Elizabeth's belief in the value of Black history and of white teachers' reluctance to teach it during contentious times. Unlike her counterpart, Elizabeth cannot retreat from teaching Black history. It is not just a professional duty; it is a personal responsibility tied to her identity as a Black woman.

Like Elizabeth, Viola is dedicated to teaching Black history and prioritizing the voices and experiences of Black people, even in the face of legislative attempts to restrict/limit such teaching. This has led to her clashing with various members of her school community, who, at times, fail to agree with her teaching approaches:

> The other thing is, when a situation arises, then I have to have a conversation with my principal or with the powers to be. And again, that takes time away from my teacher workday, which you know teachers never have enough hours or minutes in their day. So, it just pisses me off because I have 100 other things that I really need to do that's valid and this conversation really is not going to change anything. I know, wasn't this year, wasn't last year, ok it was recent, it was during the pandemic, so I know this. I had my principal come to me and we were doing a current event and it was the right to protest. It was that week and in that activity, students are given a current event or they're given a

topic that deals with protests and the protests are from different time eras, different places. So, I have the Boston Tea Party. I have the suffrage movement. I have the March on Washington. I have the protest about the pipeline and I had Black Lives Matter protests, the one after George Floyd. So, I got all of these examples of different protests and I just put students in groups, so I put them under, and it's random, I, you know, I just go through the list, put them in a group and that was the protest that you're supposed to read about and then connect it to whatever we did in class. A parent got upset that her child was to read or to learn about Black Lives Matter movement and my principal came to me and said that the parent said, "They don't do that in their home." And my thing was, do what? Talk about Black people? Talk about protests? I was absolutely pissed, absolutely pissed that I'm sitting in front of this white man that has the audacity to not even process that I'm coming to a Black person to tell them that Black lives don't matter. It never even occurred to him that him even coming to me because he should have taken care of that and squashed that from the beginning — that he didn't even process it, to have the audacity to come to me to even to discuss this and that I would not get offended because I was. Of course, Black lives matter and, and then with that, and then later on, because he knows how I run my classes, he's been a principal, he's been my principal I think for four years. Um, so one of the things that he knows is that I am truly not pushing a political agenda in my classroom. Does the students at the end feel that I am probably a liberal, probably, but it is not a political agenda that I am pushing on anyone, but he brought it up later and this was in a context of something else. He was like, "Well, there's two sides to every story," and I was like, "There's not two sides to slavery." There're no two sides to slavery, it was wrong. I don't care what time period you were talking about,

> what people you were talking about, slavery was wrong and he didn't say anything else to me because there's not two sides to every story. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

Viola's statement draws attention to the actions taken by multiple parties (all of whom are white) to deter her, a Black woman, from teaching about race, racism, and oppression. These efforts are clear acts of censorship, as they deliberately attempt to suppress and control students' access to information that expose racial power dynamics and threaten the idealized image America holds of itself. Additionally, they imply that teaching about Black people and their experiences is optional and lacks purpose beyond indoctrination. This is extremely concerning, especially for the participants in this study as they recognize the parallels between curriculum, Black humanity, and the racial hierarchy. Despite these implications, Viola maintains her commitment to incorporating the stories of Black Americans into the curriculum:

> When the local school board tried to pass a CRT initiative, and this was after North Carolina's governor had vetoed one that tried to go through the state, so then our local board is going to try to do that and one of the board members sent me an email…She wanted feedback from teachers about this initiative that she was going to try to get through the board. So, I'm reading the email and going like, "She is out of her mind." So, I went to my principal first and I told him that I was going to respond to her email and that she's probably not gonna like it. So, I wanted him to know, before I sent the email, that I am going to respond to this email. She's never responded to me after that, but after that, I show up at the school board meeting, in person, that next month's school board, and I told them exactly what I thought about them trying to pass. Then I think the next month, I couldn't make the meeting, so I sent them an email to let them know that I am still there…I left them with this — I'm not going to go away…and with that, I rally my

> friends and my colleagues and last Martin Luther King, Jr. Day we did a program in response to her sending that email. We made it for Martin Luther King Day. We did it around C.J. Hunt's documentary about Confederate soldiers on neutral ground. So we show the documentary and when we talked about why we even created this program…I was like, "I'm pissed that the school board did this." What can we do as a community...? (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

She went on to state:

> I feel so supported in the community that I think that's the reason that I don't get any pushback because they notice like, "She is just gonna…" and I was like, "Yes, I am." I'm going to come out because I don't have any allegiance to anybody, but to be the best teacher to my students…I think that's one of the reasons it's not brought to me. It's probably a lot more things that are directed at me, but I just don't know because they don't bring it to my attention because they know, based on my past behavior, she's gonna blow this up. And yes, I am…I've written a blog. I was in the *New York Times* and then they think, okay, she is not just going to do it local. (January 22, 2023, Interview 1)

Viola's quotes illustrate her willingness to fearlessly (and directly) confront both people and efforts that jeopardize the authentic teaching of Black history. Additionally, they indicate her profound commitment to combating anti-Blackness and the fatigue of her adversaries who lack her level of persistence.

According to Ida and Katherine, they do not have conflict with students, parents, or administrators when teaching topics of race, racism, or oppression because they teach at predominantly Black and Brown schools. This lack of conflict stems from unspoken

understandings, particularly within the Black community, related to the roles and expectations of Black women teachers. Katherine alluded to this notion as she stated:

> Because I do work at a predominantly minority school, I don't receive very much pushback. You know, as far as like kids who may be raised in environments that aren't inclusive. I tend to notice that students of Color's parents are open to them, you know, receiving this type of information, whereas if I were in a more rural district that may have a different demographic that's more white, you know, students are raised in different climates and a different environment, so they may be more apprehensive, for lack of a better word, of receiving that information. And then of course, you know, they may be offended, or they may have been taught something else and so they can carry it to their parents and it can create a different climate. So, because of my environment, I think it doesn't bother me, but I think had I been in a different environment. I would have to be a lot more cautious about what I'm saying. (March 12, 2023, Interview 3)

As a Black woman, Katherine recognizes the significance of her position and the influence she holds within her community. Her statement indicates that she is cognizant of the expectations placed upon her by the Black community to actively address topics of race, racism, and oppression. While she hints at the ability to do so without facing resistance (given the racial alignment between her and her students), she acknowledges the likelihood of conflict arising should she teach these matters to white students. In doing so, she calls into question the perceived worth of Black women teachers in the eyes of white Americans.

With divisive concepts legislation in place, conflict is almost inevitable between the participants in this study — Black women teachers who are committed to teaching about race, racism, and oppression — and members of the broader school community who wish to derail

such teachings. Nevertheless, emboldened by accurate historical knowledge and a profound sense of duty, these teachers directly address conflict (when confronted) and without fear.

Summary

This chapter synthesizes the experiences and pedagogical approaches of four Black female social studies teachers—Ida, Viola, Elizabeth, and Katherine—against the backdrop of today's politically charged educational landscape. Through detailed participant profiles, the chapter initially sets a foundational context that emphasizes the personal and professional backgrounds of these educators, highlighting their dedication to fostering environments where critical discussions on race and history can thrive. The emergence of themes such as *inquiry, cognitive consonance, restricting/confining, confronting miseducation/misinformation*, and *conflict,* illustrate the multifaceted challenges these teachers face, including legislative and administrative barriers that restrict their teaching scope, and the emotional toll of addressing miseducation and misinformation about Black history and racial issues. Despite these obstacles, the chapter vividly captures the educators' relentless commitment to aligning teaching content with students' realities and societal contexts, thereby challenging dominant narratives and fostering a critical awareness among their students. The conclusion of the chapter underscores the indispensable role that Black female teachers play in combating systemic racism within the educational system, despite facing significant adversities. This synthesis not only brings to light their strategic navigations through a contentious educational environment but also reaffirms their undeterred dedication to educational equity and justice, offering profound insights into the dynamics of teaching social studies during divisive times. In the final chapter, I answer the three research questions guiding this study and interpret the results of this study in light of existing literature.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore Black female social studies teachers' methods in teaching race, racism, and oppression in the current sociopolitical climate. In particular, this phenomenological study sought to understand the impact of educational gag orders on the experiences, perspectives, and practices of Black women social studies teachers. Accordingly, it was informed by the theoretical frameworks of anti-Blackness and Black feminist pedagogy. As a theoretical framework, anti-Blackness refers to Western society's disgust of Black people, and thus, its inability to recognize Black humanity (Dumas, 2016). It is anti-Blackness that empowers and normalizes violence against Black bodies, whether physical or institutional (Dumas, 2016). In the context of education, anti-Blackness is "an acknowledgement of the long history of Black struggle for educational opportunity" (Dumas, 2016, p. 16). Divisive concepts legislation perpetuates this struggle; therefore, it is a site of anti-Blackness.

While the theory of anti-Blackness provides a framework for understanding the motivations behind educational gag orders, Black feminist pedagogy captures the distinctive ways Black women teachers navigate these restrictions through the instructional strategies and methods they employ. Specifically, it refers to practices, such as othermothering and activist-oriented pedagogy, that cater to the academic and social needs of Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Foster; 1993; Vickery, 2016). Through Black feminist pedagogy, Black women teachers challenge master narratives and anti-Black ideologies, while raising the political consciousness and promoting the social mobility of Black students in anti-Black world.

As noted in Chapter 4, five themes were identified during the data analysis process — *inquiry*, *cognitive consonance*, *restricting/confining, confronting miseducation/misinformation*,

and *conflict*. Through these themes, I offer insights into Black women social studies teachers' experiences as they explore topics of race in light of legislative restrictions, illustrating the scholarly significance of this study. In particular, I contextualize the study's findings in relation to the research questions and broader literature, while also exploring its implications for practice and future research.

RQ1: Initiating Discussions about Race

Research Question 1 was: How do Black female social studies teachers initiate discussions about race and racism with their students given today's political and social context? These Black female educators predominantly utilize inquiry-based learning strategies to explore issues of race and racism, which are central to fostering an environment of critical thinking and personal reflection. This method facilitates discussions that are student-led and informed by diverse resources. Their inquiry approach not only aligns with the findings of Berry and Gross (2020) and Dixson (2003), who emphasize the significance of creating participatory and reflexive educational spaces, but also mirrors the broader pedagogical shifts towards student-led learning highlighted by Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) as essential for empowering marginalized student populations.

Findings indicate that the use of inquiry among participants varies, reflecting multiple converging factors such as the age of learners, personal experiences, and racial mismatch, leading to a preference for either guided or open inquiry. Guided inquiry is structured and intentional, enabling Black women teachers in this study to maintain an active role in the learning process, critical when addressing topics rooted in race, especially as divisive concepts legislation threatens the authentic teaching of these concepts. This approach offers a safety net for these teachers and their Black students, serving as a strategic means to counter anti-Black

historical narratives and enhance Black representation in social studies curricula (Pollock et al., 2022). Their methodological choice was critical in the context of legislation against so-called "divisive concepts," which threatens the authentic engagement with racial topics in educational settings. By maintaining a directive role, these Black women teachers work within and against these confines to ensure a comprehensive exploration of Black history and counteraction against anti-Black narratives, as discussed by Kingkade (2022) and Meckler (2022).

On the other hand, open inquiry allows students to lead the inquiry process rather than be guided through it. This approach is favored by participants like Ida and Elizabeth because it is considered more objective than guided inquiry. Recognizing that students must cultivate their own understanding to meaningfully engage in discussions about race, and thus, speak out against systemic injustices, they both embrace open inquiry. Through this method of open inquiry, these Black female teachers help students develop critical thinking skills, gain a sense of agency, and empowerment (Vickery & Salinas, 2019). Thus, open inquiry champions a more laissez-faire approach to learning, favored by educators like Ida and Elizabeth for its perceived objectivity and empowerment of students. This method of open inquiry aligns with the principles of Black feminist pedagogy which advocates for self-determination and personal agency in learning processes—key themes in the work of hooks (2015) and Collins (2009). These scholars argue that education should be a liberatory process, where students actively construct their understanding, which is particularly vital in discussions about race and systemic injustices.

Inquiry, in general, allows for the Black female social studies teachers in this study to actively participate in the learning process, offering a crucial counterbalance to the risks posed by legislation against the teaching of so-called "divisive concepts." Inquiry serves as a means to navigate and challenge anti-Black narratives and enhance Black representation in the curriculum

while also fostering critical thinking and cultivating a sense of agency and empowerment among students and themselves. Their adoption of various inquiry approaches reflects intentional strategies to navigate and counteract anti-Black curricula and contexts. These methods, whether guided or open, are chosen based on a combination of learner needs, teacher experiences, and the necessity to provide a safe yet empowering space for exploring racial issues, race, and racism in the high school social studies classroom (Dixson, 2003; Berry & Gross, 2020). On the other hand, participants might use inquiry-based instruction when teaching certain topics simply because it is revered as a best practice in social studies education (Pugh, 2023) and/or they feel comfortable and capable of implementing this approach effectively.

In the current sociopolitical climate, Black women social studies teachers in this study utilize inquiry-based methods to teach about race, racism, and oppression, navigating challenges imposed by educational gag orders through strategies informed by anti-Blackness and Black feminist pedagogy (Dillard, 2021). Anti-Blackness, highlighting the systemic devaluation of Black lives and the normalization of violence against Black bodies, frames the educational landscape as a continuation of the struggle for Black educational opportunities. Within this context, divisive concepts legislation emerges as a manifestation of anti-Blackness, restricting the authentic teaching of race and racism. In response, Black feminist pedagogy, with its emphasis on practices like othermothering and activist-oriented teaching, guides these Black women teachers in their instructional choices. Inquiry empowers them to counteract anti-Black narratives and master narratives, fostering a learning environment that not only challenges systemic injustices but also promotes the political consciousness and social mobility of Black students. Through the intentional use of guided and open inquiry, these educators navigate and resist educational constraints, tailoring their methods to the needs of their students and the

demands of the moment, thereby ensuring that discussions on race and racism are both meaningful and empowering.

The decision to use inquiry-based methods by these Black women social studies teachers acts as both a pedagogical choice and a form of resistance. This dual role is reflective of the broader historical and cultural functions of Black education as a site of resistance against oppressive narratives and a means of racial uplift. As noted by Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), such educational practices are not only about conveying content but are deeply embedded in the struggles against systemic structures that marginalize Black voices. The integration of these methods demonstrates a strategic engagement with the socio-political realities that shape educational contexts, as described by Dillard (2021) in her discussions on navigating educational constraints through Black feminist pedagogical practices. In summary, the use of inquiry-based learning by Black women social studies teachers reflects a complex interplay of pedagogical expertise, cultural awareness, and political acumen. These Black women educators draw on a rich tradition of Black educational philosophy to create empowering educational experiences that challenge dominant paradigms and encourage critical engagement with societal issues. The literature supports this approach as both a continuation of and a response to historical and contemporary challenges faced by Black educators and their students.

RQ2: Addressing Race in the Classroom

Research Question 2 was: How do Black female social studies teachers address (e.g. instructional practice, curriculum, and responses to student questions/comments) race, racism, and oppression in their classroom given today's political and social context? As noted in Chapter 4, participants use an inquiry-based approach to address these topics. However, as attacks on race education intensify, participants like Ida have chosen to adopt an approach known as "quiet

teaching" in order to mitigate the risk of reprisal. The idea of teaching "quietly" about these subjects may involve the use of indirect teaching methods, such as historical documents, literature, or art that naturally incorporates themes of race, racism, and oppression. This method allows students to engage with the material and draw their own conclusions, guided by the teacher's facilitation rather than direct instruction on these topics (Duncan, 2020). In essence, "quiet teaching" implies that there is reluctance (or fear) among some participants to openly address these topics, so these Black women social studies teachers opt for an approach that ensures learning related to these matters continues, but in a manner that protects them professionally.

Given previous attempts at curriculum censorship in the past and the ensuing consequences for teachers that failed to comply (Foster, 1999), it is of no surprise that Ida, for instance, is employing strategies that safeguards her position and influence in the classroom. Ida's method of "quiet teaching," while appearing less confrontational, is deeply rooted in a historical context of curriculum censorship, similar to strategies used during the Red Scare, where educators faced significant consequences for non-compliance (Foster, 1999). Such historical parallels are crucial for understanding the current educational strategies employed by Black female teachers like those in this study who navigate similar challenges today (Berry & Gross, 2020).

Cognitive consonance plays a critical role in how these Black women teachers address race in the social studies classroom today. This concept of cognitive consonance explains the strong alignment between these teachers' personal beliefs and their instructional strategies, even amid external tensions and constraints. Despite sociopolitical pressures, they actively confront miseducation and misinformation by incorporating race, racism, and oppression into the

curriculum through accurate historical narratives and counternarratives. This alignment supports their psychological coherence and professional integrity, allowing these Black women to continue their educational missions without succumbing to external pressures (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; hooks, 2015).

Across participants, findings show that these educators implement instructional practices that align with their unique, profound sense of purpose —the convergence of personal experiences, professional goals, and a deep-seated responsibility to educate on these topics. This sense of purpose is not only a personal conviction but also a strategic response to the broader sociopolitical challenges that threaten the integrity of educational content related to race. Their commitment to this cause fosters an educational environment where students are encouraged to engage in critical discussions about race and justice, guided by teachers who are deeply invested in both the subject matter and the holistic development of their students (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw et al., 1995). These Black women educators are driven not just by the responsibility to educate, but also by a deeper mission to empower students with knowledge that reflects the complexities of race, racism, and oppression. This dual sense of purpose fosters an educational environment where students can engage with difficult conversations about race and justice in a meaningful way, guided by teachers who are deeply invested in both the subject matter and their students' growth.

Through their pedagogical and curricular choices, these Black women educators exercise cognitive consonance by aligning their personal beliefs with their professional practices (and perhaps, their position as Black mothers), thereby fulfilling roles that extend beyond traditional teaching to influence the broader discourse on race and equity in society. Their instructional practice not only challenges systemic injustices but also promotes the political consciousness and

social mobility of their students, ensuring that discussions on race and racism remain both meaningful and empowering within the educational framework (Dillard, 2021).

RQ3: Current Teaching Experiences

Research Question 3 was: How do Black female social studies teachers describe their teaching experiences in the context of today's hostile political and social climate? The teachers in this study express a commitment to educating on sensitive topics despite restrictive legislative and social environments. Their commitment, however, is not without its challenges, leading occasionally to feelings of constraint and conflicts with colleagues, parents, and administrators, all of which demand a creative and strategic navigation of these barriers while maintaining professional integrity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; hooks, 2015). Participants' narratives reveal their conscientious and pioneering effort to navigate these challenges with resilience and fortitude.

Findings show that the Black women social studies teachers in this study, particularly those in states with educational gag orders, feel a heightened need to work harder and employ meticulous planning, constant vigilance, and sometimes personal sacrifice. This is primarily due to the professional risks associated with teaching controversial or legislatively restricted content. The balance these Black women educators strive to achieve between adhering to mandates and fulfilling their ethical obligation to teach truthfully about U.S. history is informed by both personal experiences with racism and a professional duty to empower and educate future generations accurately (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Though these Black women social studies educators may face scrutiny, backlash, or even disciplinary action, they choose to resolutely teach historically candid U.S. history in light of legislative mandates.

This heightened effort of these Black women social studies teachers stems from a deep-seated desire to provide a comprehensive and truthful education that includes the complexities of America's racial history, driven by both personal experiences with racism and a professional duty to empower and educate future generations accurately. Faced with mandates that restrict or dilute the teaching of these critical topics, these educators navigate significant challenges to correct historical narratives, foster critical thinking and empathy, and ensure educational equity. Their endeavor requires creative pedagogical strategies, the sourcing of alternative materials, and the creation of safe spaces for difficult conversations, all while managing the professional risks associated with teaching contentious subjects. Their dedication reflects not only a commitment to their students' holistic education, but also a broader aim to contribute to an informed, empathetic, and inclusive society. The strategies these Black women social studies teachers employ are underpinned by Black feminist pedagogy, which supports their engagement with race and racism in the curriculum and enables them to navigate the challenges posed by divisive concepts legislation (hooks, 2015; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). By aligning their instructional practices with their personal beliefs and values—i.e. cognitive consonance—these Black women teachers fulfill a role that extends beyond the classroom. They influence the broader discourse on race and equity in society, ensuring that their students are equipped to critically engage with and understand the complexities of racial issues, thereby empowering them to act against systemic injustices (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003).

Comparison to Literature

Black Feminist Pedagogy

Informed by Black women’s historical experience with bias and marginalization, Black feminist pedagogy refers to the explicit learning strategies employed by Black women teachers

(Omolade, 1987). These strategies aim to (a) develop Black children both academically and socially (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Omolade, 1987); (b) counter dominant historical narratives and anti-Black ideologies (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; King, 2014; Vickery, 2017); and (c) center the voices and experiences of Black people, especially those of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; King, 2014). Through practices such as othermothering and politically relevant teaching, scholars argue that Black feminist pedagogy disrupts anti-Black educational racism, uplifts Black youth, and cultivates Black agency (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Duncan, 2020; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2009; Watson, 2017). This literature is supported by the findings of this study, specifically the themes of inquiry, cognitive consonance, and confronting miseducation/misinformation.

Through inquiry, be it open inquiry or guided inquiry, the Black women social studies teachers in this study create opportunities for students to meaningfully engage with topics of race, racism, and oppression. This approach is intentional as it is meant to challenge master narratives and contribute to a more nuanced U.S. historical memory — one that acknowledges and includes Black perspectives, histories, and contributions. According to the literature, even in the face of government-sanctioned racism, Black women teachers have always used history education as a weapon against miseducation, misinformation, and Black suffering (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Duncan, 2020; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2009; Watson, 2017). In particular, research suggests that they teach in ways that consider the sociopolitical context, modifying and adapting curriculum and pedagogical practices to better support the needs of their students (Duncan, 2020; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Watson, 2017). This is especially important given the racial undertones of divisive concepts legislation and the decision to utilize inquiry-based learning to teach topics currently under attack. In essence, this implies

that inquiry is actually a tenet of Black feminist pedagogy, specifically in the context of teaching social studies. As such, it is also fundamental to abolitionist teaching, which, according to Love (2019), "is the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools" (p.2).

The literature maintains that Black feminist pedagogy is critical for addressing the educational injustices Black students are susceptible to. In doing so, it also acknowledges the fundamental role of identity and intersectionality in shaping this approach (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2009), thereby underlining the importance of cognitive consonance, too. Studies show that Black women's identities influence their pedagogical decisions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Hudson-Vassell et al., 2018 Vickery et al., 2019), impacting what they teach, how they teach, and the level of comfortability in which they teach (Dillard, 2022). Findings from this study show that participants, especially during divisive times, teach in a manner that is consistent with their beliefs and the realities of their racial identity. For these Black women teachers, cognitive consonance stems from a profound sense of purpose and responsibility to teach about race, challenge dominant historical narratives, and uplift Black students. As Collins (2009) contends, there is an expectation for Black women teachers to engage in this work on behalf of the Black community. Thus, cognitive consonance is the utmost display of their commitment. In contrast, white teachers tend to experience cognitive dissonance as they are more likely to put their job interest ahead of the ethical responsibility to teach about race, racism, and oppression. Nevertheless, one might question if Black parents, or the African American community in general, even expect, let alone trust, white teachers to teach these topics authentically.

Racialized History

According to the literature, U.S. social studies education has served, and continues to serve, as a means to reinforce and maintain white supremacy (King, 2017; King & Woodson, 2017). From the late nineteenth century onwards, social studies curriculum and textbooks were used by white, heterosexual men, to assert dominance and control over Black and Brown bodies (King, 2014; Love, 2019). Infiltrated with anti-Black ideologies and misinformation, these resources often underscore Black people and Blackness as inferior, while positioning whites and whiteness as the opposite (King, 2014). In doing so, this creates master narratives and a U.S. historical memory that ensures Black suffering, as it perpetuates historical inaccuracies and superficial portrayals of Black history (King & Woodson, 2017; Love, 2019). As a result, generations of Americans are not only miseducated, but ill-equipped to critically analyze racial issues and participate in discussions about race.

A key finding from this study, the theme of conflict, supports this literature. As outlined in Chapter 4, when teaching topics rooted in race, participants often experience pushback and resistance from white members of their school community, be it colleagues, parents, or administrators. Although this study does not yield why white people are the primary source of this opposition, the literature suggests that it is because such teachings threaten white privilege and contemporary power structures. Scholarship has long maintained that a comprehensive, more truthful account of U.S. history, especially in regards to the experiences and contributions of African Americans, empowers Black students. When empowered by factual knowledge, conflict is a minute hiccup in the quest for racial equality and moving the Black race forward. As stated by Anderson (2016):

> The trigger for white rage, inevitably is black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem; rather, it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship. It is blackness that refuses to accept subjugation, to give up. A formidable array of policy assaults and legal contortions has consistently punished black resilience, black resolve. (p.4)

With the release of the 1619 Project in 2019, coupled with the 2020 George Floyd protests, the white power structure appeared to be in jeopardy. As a result, anti-CRT efforts and divisive concepts bills were introduced in state legislatures throughout the country to ensure social studies education continues to reinforce narratives that preserve the status quo and limit discussions about race. However, despite the preceding, these Black women social studies teachers remain committed to correcting such narratives.

Implications

Although there is a significant amount of scholarship that explores the experiences and pedagogical mechanisms of Black women teachers, relatively few focus specifically on those that teach social studies. This is especially concerning given Black women teachers' profound sense of obligation to utilize social studies education as a means to dispel anti-Black ideologies, decenter whiteness, and integrate authentic Black narratives. Additionally, with laws restricting how teachers can teach and discuss topics of race, racism, and oppression, studying the Black female social studies experience is even more critical. While this study addresses a significant gap in the literature, more importantly, it illustrates the layered complexities surrounding the intersection of race, identity, subject content, and contentious times. As such, this study acknowledges that these entities create both a collective experience for Black women social studies teachers, but also an individual one shaped by personal, professional, and community

experiences. Characterized by themes of *inquiry*, *cognitive consonance*, *restricting/confining*, *confronting miseducation/misinformation*, and *conflict*, findings from this study have implications for educators, policymakers, curriculum developers, and future research.

Given participants' intentional use of inquiry when teaching topics rooted in race, this study encourages professional development opportunities that not only strengthen teachers' implementation of this strategy, but builds their working racial knowledge so they can actively (and comfortably) engage in critical discussions about race, both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, given the interrelatedness of education policy and social studies curriculum, it is imperative that (a) divisive concepts legislation is immediately retracted as it subjects Black students, in particular, to educative-psychic violence; (b) social studies standards and curriculum are revised to be inclusive of Black and Brown experiences, including those related to their cultural contributions throughout the history of the United States; and (c) the expertise of Black women social studies teachers is called upon for this work as it is a continuation of what they already do. In addition to the preceding, the findings of this study underscore the importance of adequate support and protections for Black women teachers. This could take the form of affinity groups or even genuine backing and respect of the distinctive pedagogical approaches they employ to meet the needs of their students.

Given both the purpose and findings of this study, there are several recommendations for future research. First and foremost, scholarly investigations should begin to explore the experiences of Black female social studies teachers separately from those of Black female teachers. This is imperative given the dearth of literature that does in spite of the critical work that they do. Moreover, a further examination of the racialized conceptions of cognitive

consonance and cognitive dissonance (as it relates to beliefs and instructional practices) could provide valuable insights into the convergence of identity and content.

Through the lens of Black feminist pedagogy and anti-Blackness, findings from this study suggest addressing the challenges faced by these Black women social studies teachers requires a multifaceted approach. The commitment of these educators to navigate the hostile political and social climate, as informed by their personal experiences with racism and professional duty, underscores the need for targeted research, supportive educational practices, informed policymaking, and inclusive curriculum standards.

Empower Through Research

Research should delve deeper into the specific experiences and strategies of Black women social studies teachers, exploring how their identity and the concept of cognitive consonance influence their pedagogical choices. Future research should prioritize the exploration of Black female social studies teachers' pedagogical approaches, particularly those shaped by their lived experiences and racial identities. This involves a deeper examination of how Black feminist pedagogy and the educators' personal commitments to truth and empowerment influence their teaching strategies, especially in environments hostile to discussions of race and racism. Such research can illuminate the resilience and innovation these educators bring to their classrooms, contributing valuable insights to the broader educational discourse.

Enhance Educator Preparation and Support

Educators would benefit from professional development that not only enhances their ability to employ inquiry-based teaching on race-related topics but also strengthens their racial knowledge, fostering confidence in facilitating critical discussions. Professional development programs must be re-envisioned to not only provide Black women social studies teachers with

the tools and resources necessary for inquiry-based and culturally responsive teaching, but also to create supportive networks where educators can share strategies and experiences. These programs should focus on building teachers' capacities to navigate the complexities of discussing race and racism, bolstered by an understanding of Black feminist pedagogy and strategies to counter anti-Blackness in educational materials and discourse. Administrators play a crucial role in supporting these Black women teachers by valuing their unique pedagogical approaches and providing the necessary resources to teach controversial subjects amidst professional risks.

Advocate for Policy Change

Policymakers must reconsider divisive concepts legislation, recognizing the detrimental effects on educational equity and the psychosocial well-being of students, especially from marginalized communities. Policymakers are urged to critically assess and, where necessary, repeal legislation that stifles educators' ability to engage students in meaningful discussions about race, racism, and oppression. Additionally, policies should be implemented to protect teachers who are dedicated to providing a truthful and comprehensive education from backlash or professional repercussions. This includes advocating for the integration of Black histories and perspectives into the curriculum as a standard, not an exception.

Revise Curriculum Standards

The revision of social studies standards and curricula should aim for inclusivity and historical accuracy, incorporating the rich diversity of perspectives, particularly those of Black and Brown peoples. Engaging Black female social studies teachers in curriculum development acknowledges their indispensable role in challenging anti-Black narratives and promoting a comprehensive, truthful education. The active involvement of Black female social studies teachers elevates expertise and is invaluable in crafting educational materials that accurately

reflect America's racial diversity and complexities. Engaging these Black women educators in the curriculum development process acknowledges their role in combating miseducation and misinformation and ensures that the curriculum promotes critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of social justice issues.

Foster a Supportive Educational Environment

Administrators play a crucial role in creating and maintaining environments that support the unique challenges and contributions of Black female social studies teachers. This involves recognizing the value of their pedagogical approaches, providing the necessary resources for them to teach effectively, and defending their academic freedom to explore sensitive topics with students. Creating such an environment not only benefits educators but also enriches students' learning experiences, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic school culture.

Ultimately, the recommendations from this study are not just about improving the professional experiences of these Black women social studies teachers; they are about recognizing and amplifying their role in shaping a more informed, critical, and compassionate generation of students. By aligning research, policy, and practice with the principles of Black feminist pedagogy and an acknowledgment of anti-Blackness, the educational community can take significant steps toward not only addressing the immediate challenges these educators face but also contributing to the broader project of social justice and equity. By adopting these recommendations, the educational community can move towards a more equitable and just educational system that recognizes and harnesses the strengths of Black women social studies teachers. Such efforts will not only improve the teaching and learning experiences in social studies classrooms but also contribute to a societal shift towards greater understanding, equity, and inclusion.

Conclusion

This dissertation study, centered on the experiences of Black female social studies teachers navigating the complexities of today's political and social climate, underscores the resilience, innovation, and commitment of these educators to fostering critical discussions about race, racism, and oppression. Through the lens of Black feminist pedagogy and an understanding of anti-Blackness, the research illuminates the strategic and intentional methods these teachers employ to engage students in meaningful learning, despite facing legislative and societal constraints. The recommendations derived from this study call for a concerted effort from researchers, educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to support and empower Black female social studies teachers. By prioritizing research that explores their unique pedagogical approaches, enhancing professional development opportunities, advocating for policy changes, revising curriculum standards to be more inclusive, and fostering supportive educational environments, we can begin to address the systemic barriers that these educators face. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue about educational equity, the importance of inclusive history education, and the need for a curriculum that reflects the diverse realities of all students. It urges the educational community to recognize the invaluable role of Black female social studies teachers in shaping a more just, informed, and empathetic society.

Hence, this study provides insight into how these Black female social studies teachers teach topics of race, racism, and oppression during times of contention. As such, it is the first of its kind, pioneering new avenues for future scholarly investigations which document the ways Black female teachers navigate social studies curricula in a contested sociopolitical climate. With new attacks on racial equity underway (e.g. anti-DEI laws, book bans, and the ending of affirmative action in higher education admissions), this study serves as a call to action to

safeguard and strengthen the efforts of inclusivity and to resist regressive policies that subject Black and Brown bodies to further marginalization — keeping ourselves informed, educated, and empowered through research akin to this and by valuing the voices and expertise of Black women teachers and other educators of Color.

As a Black woman who currently designs social studies curriculum for one of the nation's largest school districts, I am invested in the criticality of this study. I am an "insider," so not only do I share in the sentiments expressed by Ida, Viola, Elizabeth, and Katherine, I see (and feel) how today's hostile sociopolitical climate both fuels and enrages us, yet, more importantly, forces us to be great — to embrace "our turn" to occupy the front lines. Historically, Black women have always "done the work," but this time around, we need help. We need more than Black women. We need allyship — across race, across gender — to enact policy changes (as we alone do not possess such power in this country). Effective allyship and the role of white allies in anti-racist work, as discussed by scholars (DiAngelo, 2018; Helms, 1990; Leonardo, 2004), involves recognizing the structural and systemic power imbalances that perpetuate inequality and actively working in solidarity to dismantle them. These perspectives and the leadership of Black women educators can guide the development of allyship that supports substantial policy changes, promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational system with a shared responsibility across race and gender.

Through this these women, I have learned the extent to which some Black women teachers will go to ensure social studies is not taught in vain, often making me feel that I could and should be doing more than what I am, be it for students, social studies education (as a whole), or Black women social studies teachers (in general). It is through them that we learn Black female teachers' voices must be present in social studies curriculum and for these

discussions, inquiry is a valuable tool. It is through them — Ida, Viola, Elizabeth, and Katherine — that the existing literature on Black women social studies teachers is expanded and solidified in value.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 1

Date:

Teacher Identity and Social Studies

1. Describe yourself as a social studies teacher.
    a. What do you believe is your purpose?
    b. How does this align with what it means to teach social studies?
2. How does your racial identity impact your work as a social studies educator?
3. How does your gender identity impact your work as a social studies educator?
4. As a Black female teacher in social studies, what do you believe is your responsibility to Black students in regards to learning about race, racism, and oppression?
5. What do you believe is your responsibility to non-Black students in regards to learning about race, racism, and oppression?

Instructional Practice

6. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to read about racism and/or oppression?
    a. Has this been affected by today's political and social climate?
    b. If so, how?
7. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to discuss racism and/or oppression?
    a. Has this been affected by today's political and social climate?
    b. If so, how?
8. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to write about racism and/or oppression?
    a. Has this been affected by today's political and social climate?
    b. If so, how?

Curriculum

9. What do you teach that actually aligns with race and/or racism?
10. How and/or when do you center Black voices and experiences (based on the current curriculum)?
    a. How does this compare to the ways in which you teach the traditional curriculum that emphasizes white history?
11. How do you use counternarratives to tell the stories of Black history?

Tensions and Discomfort

12. How would you describe a "safe classroom" given today's political and social context?
13. Classrooms are supposed to be safe spaces for all students. In your opinion, why is school the appropriate place for students to learn about race, racism, and oppression?

14. How do you make your classroom a "safe space" for students to read, talk, and write about race, racism, and oppression?
15. Many argue that discussing race and racism in the classroom creates tension and feelings of discomfort, especially for White students. This implies that discomfort is only a concern when white students are affected. How do you feel about the fact that the discomfort of Black students has not garnered similar attention in education?
16. Learning has been described as an uncomfortable, unsettling process. There has to be a threshold for discomfort that is needed to authentically understand the complexities of history. How do you help students work through (or use) discomfort to understand race, racism, and oppression?

Responding to Policy

17. Do you think the state standards for US history are inclusive of Black experiences?
    a. Do the standards center Black history?
18. Much media attention has been given to educational gag orders that legally limit the teaching of history, in particular the teaching of race, racism, and oppression. How has media debates and/or community/school dialogue about the legislation affected your teaching, curriculum, or interaction with students?
19. How do legislative attempts to limit the teaching of segregation, slavery, and structural racism affect your efforts to teach students that an individual is oppressed solely based on his/her race?

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 2

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 2

Date:

Lesson Talk

1. Describe how the curriculum is determined at your school.

If the participant has a lot of choice in the curriculum…

   a. What inspires your curricular decisions?
   b. What hinders your curricular decisions?

If the participant does not have a lot of choice in the curriculum…

   a. Describe any opportunities you have to incorporate alternative topics into the curriculum.

2. Describe a lesson in which you center race.
   a. What were the lesson objectives?
   b. What were your personal goals for the lesson?
   c. What opportunities did you provide in the lesson for students to read about racism and/or oppression?
   d. What opportunities did you provide in the lesson for students to discuss racism and/or oppression?
   e. What opportunities did you provide in the lesson for students to write about racism and/or oppression?
3. Describe students' contributions during the lesson.
   a. Who spoke up?
   b. What kinds of things did the students say?
4. Describe any follow-up responses you received from students after teaching the lesson.
5. How did your students respond to the lesson?
6. What do you think went well in the lesson?
7. What would you revise about the lesson?
   a. Why?
8. How did you feel teaching the lesson?
9. What were your feelings after teaching the lesson?
10. Were there any surprises or moments of discomfort during the lesson?
    a. If so, describe them.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 3

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - INTERVIEW 3

Date:

Instructional Practice

1. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to read about racism and/or oppression?
    a. Has this been affected by today's political and social climate? If so, how?
2. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to discuss racism and/or oppression?
3. What opportunities do you provide in your classroom for students to write about racism and/or oppression?

Curriculum

4. What do you teach that actually aligns with race and/or racism?
5. How and/or when do you center Black voices and experiences (based on the current curriculum)?
    a. How does this compare to the ways in which you teach the traditional curriculum that emphasizes white history?
6. How do you use counternarratives to tell the stories of Black history?

Policy

7. How does today's political and social context influence your instructional practice?
    a. Have you been afraid to teach anything?
    b. If so, what?
    c. If so, why?
    d. If not, why not?
8. Are you familiar with CRT? If so, what do you know about it?
9. Parents and politicians are worried that children are being indoctrinated with critical race theory. Consequently, anti-critical race theory and divisive concepts bills are being drafted and passed throughout the nation. What are your thoughts and reactions to this new, yet widespread anti-CRT hysteria?
    a. How do you interpret/perceive divisive concepts legislation?
10. In your opinion, what are politicians trying to censor and/or accomplish via divisive concepts legislation?
    a. What would be your counter argument to convince your community to challenge these efforts?
11. What would you say to those who suggest learning about race/racism, privilege, and oppression in schools makes white students feel discomfort or guilt and/or teaches students to "hate" the United States?

12. How has your school district or school administration responded to today's political and social context?
    a. Do you feel pressured to avoid conversations about race, racism, or oppression?
    b. Do you feel these pressures are different from other teachers because you are Black?
13. If these efforts continue, what are your biggest concerns for Black students?
    a. Black teachers?
14. If these efforts continue, what are your biggest concerns for non-Black students?
    a. non-Black teachers?
    b. Social studies education as a whole?