

UNBUILT BRIDGES: EXAMINING THE INCLUSION OF THE UNITED STATES IN  
WORLD HISTORY

By

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## ABSTRACT

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This study explored how world history teachers think about the United States and the world in their practice. The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers make decisions about including the United States in their world history instruction and how those choices position the United States in relation to the world. The study sought to consider how teachers describe their roles as world history teachers and the ways they exercise these roles to reinforce or challenge broad cultural ideas such as American exceptionalism.

This qualitative study focused on the reflections and descriptions of four world history teachers in the same Midwestern state. Semi-structured interviews that included prompts and resources were used to collect data over two months in the spring of 2020. Figured worlds and teacher decision making were combined with a macro discourse analysis to examine participant responses and resources.

While other studies have examined world history curriculum more broadly or how teachers organize world history content, the findings of this study suggest that while teachers aspire to broaden student views of the world, they are influenced by more than that aspiration. Their instructional decisions are also influenced by broader cultural understandings such as American exceptionalism and Western-influenced theories of democracy. These cultural understandings position the United States as an exemplar, a modern power, an extension of Western actions or as separated from the happenings of the rest of the world at times.

This study suggests that teachers, both in and pre-service teachers navigate a variety of considerations and influences in their teaching. It also demonstrates that teachers might benefit from more opportunities to examine the ways that societal views impact their choices as well as access to decolonial knowledge that might also impact their choices.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation study, I explore how world history teachers think about the binary of the United States and the world in their present practice. Teachers are influenced by state or district curriculum which often prescribe separate years of study for world and U.S. history. These separations may cause practitioners to restrict what they teach which in turn shapes student learning. In the case of world history courses, the exclusion of the United States when learning about global patterns and ideas could reinforce ideas of American exceptionalism or at the very least an isolationist view of the United States. Conversely, framing world history through a U.S. lens has a potentially similar outcome.

This qualitative study includes four participants who teach world history in a midwestern state with era-based world history standards and state testing. The study seeks to understand the reasoning these teachers employ in their instructional choices regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the United States in their world history classes, as well as how each manifest pedagogically and with what consequences. I examine these cases through the theory of figured worlds. Figured worlds affords the opportunity to examine how these individuals perceive their own identity and agency in these decisions. The study provides an opportunity to consider how broader societal views of the United States and the world are enacted by the participants.

#### **Overview**

The fact remains that the characteristic split, between purely United States courses and a world or something-else course, not only leaves bridges unbuilt but fosters in many students, a truly unfortunate tendency toward historical isolationism, as the

complexities and troubles of most of the world's history seem oddly unrelated to the glorious saga of our own ascent (Stearns, 2008, p. 120 in Dunn, R. E., Mitchell, L. J., & Ward, K. (Eds.), 2016).

As prominent world historian Peter Stearns implies above, too often history curriculum and instruction limit how practitioners conceptualize the actual teaching of history so that students cannot see the “bridges” that connect eras, places, and events. This “historical isolationism”, as Stearns calls it, creates a siloed view of not only the past, but the present connections among nations and regions. This can and does occur in all types of history courses, but world history, in particular, is dependent upon the development of connections between places and time. Without these linkages, world history courses fail to foster a comparative picture of human experience. This failure to help students understand global relationships can happen in many contexts, but possibly none as rarely considered as how students understand the role of the United States within a global context.

Increased concern over global understandings and relationships has fueled greater inclusion of world history in K-12 social studies curriculum. It has increased dramatically in popularity in the last few decades due in part to newly required courses and the growth of Advanced Placement (AP) World History (Dunn, Mitchell, & Ward, 2016; Bain & Shreiner, 2005; Manning, 2003). This has not resulted in a unified approach to world history, however. While world history standards for the fifty states and Washington, D.C. vary greatly (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010; Mead, 2006), they neither reflect a global approach nor do they specifically include much U.S. history. Although they are not universally adopted across the fifty states, the National Standards for History (Crabtree & Nash, 1996) include standards for both world and

U.S. history that reinforce that the subjects should be separately developed and taught but have content that shows their connections.

In spite of the recommendation of interconnected study, states have not adopted this approach. In some states, the U.S. and world history have separate standards. In others, the standards are not specific to areas of history and provide little guidance for educators in how to integrate the subjects. States such as Illinois and Maine have no specific world or U.S. standards, while Michigan, New York, and New Jersey have separate sets of standards for world and U.S. history. Under both sets of circumstances, educators are left with little direction for integrating the subjects. Although academic historians and architects of the national history standards have challenged these separations more recently, Stephen Thornton (2005) asserts that curriculum mandates that are broad in nature have been unsuccessful in changing instruction as opposed to educating teachers on their roles as gatekeepers who can manage their instructional choices accordingly. Without understanding their roles as gatekeepers, teachers likely continue to replicate the instructional strategies and choices that segregate historical content from connected meaning (Thornton, 2005).

Additionally, these segmented histories are not just a part of k-12 schooling, but rather reflect the ways in which academic historians organize the U.S. and world history as separate subjects and have been transitioned into K-12 teaching as a model. While teachers may find these divisions helpful for defining what is taught, they also reinforce a certain type of historical and civic narrative. In the case of the United States, the nation's history is explored but in an insular way. Similarly, world history courses may largely exclude the United States. Thomas Bender (2006) wrote about the dangers of such a separation and called upon academic historians to reconsider how U.S. history is framed so as to provide a more global context. Carl Guarneri

(2007) adds that world history without the U.S. is nonsensical given both the influences of other parts of the world on the U.S. and the U.S.'s growing influence on the rest of the world

Another concern lies in the ways that U.S. content is included in world history courses. This seems to suggest that either including or excluding the United States can be problematic, and for good reason. If world history courses are framed from a U.S. perspective then they pose the potential of simply reinforcing Western views of the world. James Blaut (2012) and John Willinsky (1989) both argue the dangers of continuing Eurocentric narratives that viewing the world through a U.S.-focused lens can easily reinforce. Specifically, Blaut (2012) discourages continuing a curriculum of "Eurocentric diffusion". "Eurocentric diffusion" centers around not only Western topics but also the view that non-Western history follows from the West (Blaut, 2012). Rebecca Cairns' (2020) study of Asian history curriculum affirmed this pervasiveness of Western history as she found that traditional points of reference still dominated efforts to do otherwise. Tadashi Dozono (2020) went further in noting that non-western voices are not only missing from world history curriculum but have no space for agency within it. Even when teachers include content from other regions, they continue to view their histories in relation to Western narratives. Teachers are products of their own historical knowledge (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988).

As in the case of this study, practitioners raised in the United States are shaped by narratives about history that they learned as students; they largely view the scope of history, United States or world, through their own educations. Presumably those narratives were from a U.S. perspective. The four world history teachers from a Midwestern industrial state in this study described how they consider the United States as part of their world courses. As noted, these white, U.S.-born and educated teachers were products of their upbringings, both location and

education, in relation to their framing of world history. In four interviews with each participant, they described their decision making as it relates to both world history generally and the inclusion of the United States specifically in those courses. These decisions followed from how the participants saw their roles and identities as world history teachers in their respective districts that were mostly suburban and largely white. One participant did offer a notable exception to this as he taught in a majority-minority district. The participants described their roles and identities in relation to a variety of influences ranging from their experiences, their communities, and available resources—all of these factors related to their U.S. backgrounds and educations.

Therefore, the approach to world history, both generally and specifically, to incorporating the United States into these courses, is critical. Blaut (2012) stresses that the Eurocentric approach lacks representation and value for the diverse populations of the world. Some of this lies in the chosen content, but potentially more so in the implicit perspective of the teachers. Decolonial and South Asian Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) questioned whether European thinking could be decentered from the study of history even in non-European places. Likewise, historians Gyan Prakash (1994) and Frederick Cooper (1994) expand this argument by highlighting the limitations of Westerners' ability to provide accounts that represent non-Westerners' views of their own societies and histories. Western-educated teachers would need to approach historical study without superimposing the lens of progress and ideals that are implicitly in their lessons and resources.

To approximate this, Prakash (1994) suggests that Westerners must study the gaps in their understanding of history in order to improve their conception of non-Western histories. Efforts to improve social studies or history curriculum to correct these cracks have proven difficult. One way to think about this is to consider topics included in a curriculum such as the

Boxer Rebellion in China, the British occupation in India or the Italian attempts at colonization in Ethiopia. These topics include non-Western locations, but they may still be framed as Western if the emphasis remains on the European actions. Another consideration is if topics and/or perspectives leave space for histories centered in indigenous experiences. Cairns aforementioned (2020) study suggested that in spite of a concerted push to decolonize Asian history, most of the treatment echoed Western framing. Cairn (2020) described how even in an Asian history course the content focused primarily on topics related to Asian interactions with the west, such as British imperialism and resistance by Gandhi. Cairn's work affirmed Young Chun Kim, Seungho Moon and Jaehong Joo's (2013) work that explored colonial epistemologies of world history in South Korean textbooks and found that Eastern contributions were framed through Western lenses. In a study of Canadian textbooks Ehaab Abdou (2017) similarly found that ancient history references tended to ignore sub-Saharan African contributions to civilizations, but instead prioritized Western societies. Moreover, Jenni Conrad's (2019) analysis of the Big History Project revealed that this increasingly popular curriculum is no less guilty of Western framing and content. In short, colonial views of history are pervasive internationally as well as in curriculum originating in the West, including the United States.

Understandably, many Decolonial and Postcolonial scholars question how individuals can separate from their own perceptions of society in order to recognize the experiences of others. Gayatri Spivak's (2003) work argued that one can never truly know the subaltern classes or comprehend their lives. Political scientist Partha Chatterjee (2012) elaborated on Spivak's concept by explaining that decolonial movements must come from the oppressed and that other attempts still frame the subaltern in the language of colonizers. Still, a purpose of decolonial study is to capture knowledge and possibly experiences that have been pushed aside as a product

of settler colonialism. Even with these striking challenges posed by Decolonial and Postcolonial scholars above, Chatterjee (2012) argued that just as teaching may be how these colonial views are reinforced, teaching can also be the answer to challenge them.

This transcending of cultural narratives would require intentional efforts on the part of educators and those who prepare them. As world history teachers already navigate an overwhelming and varied curriculum, one might question the value in this work for U.S. classrooms. The argument is well-situated within the fields of multicultural and global education, both of which could be important considerations in world history curriculum. Global education is distinct from world history. Brian Girard and Lauren McArthur Harris (2018) explained this by saying that global education allows for a more critical lens through its interpretation of cultural patterns that cross national boundaries. Global education also has more civics embedded in it than world history courses (Gaudelli, 2014). From this perspective, Merry Merryfield and Binaya Subedi (2006) suggest that students can only have a global perspective if they can grasp the interconnectedness of the world and recognize the complexity of others' experiences. Moreover, students who are privileged by race, gender, orientation, class, etc. will struggle more to gain the perspective consciousness that is part of being global (Merryfield & Subedi, 2006). This global view is arguably centered in the local. In the case of the United States, globalization is reflected in increasing diversity of the U.S. population (Banks, 2013). In this way, expanding the narratives of world history beyond western views affirms the actual history of the United States and not the all-too-familiar narratives that Blaut (2012) and Willinsky (1998) reference.

While rearranging or refocusing the study of world history to include the United States in meaningful ways may pose a problem of integrating the two, the separation of the United States from the rest poses a political issue as well a conceptual one in dealing with American



separateness or exceptionalism. American exceptionalism is the view that the United States follows its own historical path that is infused with a deep devotion to a specific set of beliefs (Lipsett, 1997). The idea of American exceptionalism positions the United States as apart from and a model for the rest of the globe. This placement of the United States affirms deeply held American myths surrounding the uniqueness of the nation (Guarneri and Davis, 2008). This sense of greatness has been invoked to both encourage and discourage U.S. involvement in the world. During the political turmoil of the Trump presidency and after the insurrection in the U.S. Capitol earlier in 2021, writers at *The Washington Post*, *the Atlantic* and *The New York Times* argued that American exceptionalism and the ways in which the United States has been a model of democracy in the globe were no longer true. *The New York Times* Editorial Board, wrote on January 8 of how the U.S. had taken on this mantle of exceptionalism,

To friends and foes, and through triumphs and crises, the United States has stood as the standard of democracy and freedom since the last two world wars. When it was criticized and even reviled — whether over the Vietnam War, the arms race of the Cold War or the Watergate scandal — it was over its failure to live up to its own standards, and Americans were always quick to reassure its allies that “we’re better than that.”

The idea of this high moral standard even when appearing to be less than a stellar model has often been a recurring theme in the popular media. TV pundit and former U.S. Congressman Joe Scarborough wrote in an op-ed piece in 2020 that he still believed in American exceptionalism in spite of how poorly the government was handling the COVID-19 pandemic. The invoking of

American exceptionalism as a standard that the United States has for itself implies its embeddedness in U.S. culture.

American exceptionalism extends beyond broader culture into schools. Guarneri and Jim Davis (2008) suggest that this creates a “special civic agenda that the teachers of American history are asked to promote” (xi). In essence, this curricular construct, and how teachers translate it, may support a rise in nationalistic ideas, often associated with American exceptionalism. Guarneri (2017) argues that this idea of American exceptionalism permeates the work of textbook approval boards as well as the views of parents and students who fear that internationalism devalues national pride. These ideas may be more obvious in how U.S. history is approached but have clear implications for the teaching of world history as well.

World history courses, which have often been viewed as the teaching of the “rest”, can easily be positioned as separate from U.S. history. Academic historians recognize that the integration of the United States into world history courses is “as formidable as it is compelling” (Stearns, 1989, p. 120 in Dunn, R. E., Mitchell, L. J., & Ward, K. (Eds.), 2016). By considering how teachers make decisions regarding their curriculum, this study provides insights into how the present integration of national and world history negotiates this tension well as the ways in which these enactments reflect societal constructs. Throughout the interviews in this study, I asked the participants not only what decisions they made, but also what factors both proximal and cultural influenced their decisions. The interviews also came at an unusual time in the participants’ teaching careers. The study occurred over a few months during the spring of 2020 during which time the teachers were not in face-to-face instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This unintended timing afforded the participants a reflective break in their traditional instruction. Undoubtedly, this circumstance and interviews provided both time and prompting for

the participants to reflect on the factors that influence their decision making, their own views of the United States as part of world history courses, and the embedded narratives that might be part of their instructional practices.

### **Research Questions**

In studying these ideas, I pursued the following questions:

1. How, if at all, do teachers think about incorporating the United States into World History courses?
2. How do these teachers make these decisions and on what factors are those decisions made?
3. How do these instructional choices frame the relationship between the U.S. and other countries?

Through the exploration of these questions, I studied how the participating world history teachers make curricular choices about including or not the United States in their classrooms. Each teacher navigates multiple figured worlds, but of interest in this study is how their imagined identity impacts their world history classroom. Of course, a classroom community is composed of students and teachers, but is also influenced in both real and imagined ways those not immediately present in the room, such as parents, administrators and creators of curricular standards and resources. Moreover, there are cultural understandings of how high school history classrooms operate and inherent hierarchies therein. Additionally, broader societal ideas of exceptionalism or the international role of the United States also influence the discussions and activities of these classrooms. Those larger cultural contexts are formed and re-formed by both the teachers and students as well as materials and resources that they use in their classroom activities. In this study, I focused on the explanations, identity and agency of the participating

teachers. This does not suggest that students are not active participants capable of shaping the discourses of the classroom community, but rather that understanding the role and choices that individual teachers make about the U.S.'s place in world history recognizes the ways in which their position and privilege influences their classroom's figured worlds.

### **Literature Review**

Although history education seems to receive more attention than other social studies topics, world history is secondary to U.S. history in the amount of research completed. There are many reasons that national histories would garner greater attention including the role it can play in nurturing national pride, but world history is increasingly taught in schools (as noted above) and has unique curricular demands. Relatedly, K-12 world history research has largely focused on those unique and broad curricular demands. Beyond primary and secondary education, academic historians have focused on how practitioners might make sense and connections for their students across vast time and place. Possibly due to the concerns over the vast curriculum and the ways that teachers make sense of it, there are many areas not explored in world history instruction. One area largely not discussed in world history curriculum remains the inclusion of the United States into world history courses while, in the past two decades, the inclusion of world history connections into U.S. history has been a focus for some U.S. historians and the American Historical Association (AHA) (Bender, 2000). Historians like Bender (2000) and Guarneri (2017) have urged academic historians specializing in American history to consider how they position the United States in relation to world events, in hopes that historians encourage a less isolationist view of the United States.

## **An Overview of K-12 World History Research**

One element that seems to be common to world history research is to acknowledge the inherent challenges of a broad curriculum. Many articles about world history curriculum first note either that world history is evolving out of the shortcomings of a Western Civilization (Western Civ) approach or the great challenges of coverage in world history courses. Girard and Harris (2012) described world history as a catch-all course that varies based on the state or even school. Academic historians routinely make this point as well (Dunn, Mitchell & Ward, 2016; Watt, 2012). Many scholars reference that different state curricula are largely Western-focused and favor European topics (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010; Girard & Harris, 2012; Bain & Schreiner, 2005; Mead, 2006). Not all view this focus on Western Civ as static. Michael Marino and Jane Bolgatz (2010) and Ross Dunn, Laura Mitchell, and Kerry Ward (2016) are optimistic that recent world history approaches allow for less regional and national ones in the future. While the AP World History curriculum limiting of Western civ content (Stearns, 2010) suggests a shifted approach, the focus on European history remains a concern for educational researchers and historians alike.

Others have studied another significant challenge of world history: how teachers conceptualize the vast amount of content that can be included in such a course (Harris, 2014; Harris, 2012; Harris & Bain, 2011). Both Harris (2014) and Harris and Robert Bain (2011) draw on a card-sorting method that Harris used as part of her dissertation study to discuss world history instruction and grouping of content. Harris and Bain (2011) seek to understand how Lee Shulman's (1986) idea of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) might manifest itself in world history classes. The authors propose that the development of PCK by historians and teacher educators would help practitioners to develop broader understandings of world history with and

for their students (Harris & Bain, 2011). In part, these scholars argue that practitioners need more fluency at developing big themes and overarching ideas for teaching world history. Essentially, while content knowledge is important, developing world history conceptual devices allows teachers to bridge periods and scales of time. According to the authors, this is a necessary component of teaching world history. These difficulties of conceptualizing content are not limited to K-12 teaching as historians also feel ill-prepared to teach world history surveys (Watt, 2012). It is telling that world history research often mentions the historic shortcomings of and current coverage dilemmas that plague world history courses.

Additionally, researchers often consider a purpose and outcome of world history to be a greater understanding of globalization. As scholars discuss challenges that practitioners face with the volumes and range of world history content, scholars try to frame the content in useful ways that align with the goals of social studies education more broadly. A goal emphasized by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2010) is educating students about global interdependence. This goal can be taken up within the realm of global citizenship as teachers make connections between various peoples of the world. Girard and Harris (2013) examine how global citizenship could be employed in world history courses by studying how this concept sensibly fits and is already used in some world history curricula, such as *World History for Us All*. Watt (2012)'s exploration of world history similarly echoes Girard and Harris's (2013) aspirations of employing global citizenship to better represent twenty-first-century society. Both of these pieces suggest one of the values of learning about world history is that it has relevance today and the economic and geo-political world that students will enter. It appears that these values would involve incorporating the United States, if for no other reasons than the United States is a huge economic presence in the global market.

Scholars have also focused on how teachers conceptualize curriculum and frame it in ways that allow for connections across time and space. While the inclusion of global citizenship concepts in world history suggests a civic agenda for world history, there exist opportunities in the body of scholarship to look at how the United States is framed in relation to the rest of the world. The focus on teacher framing of content can add to earlier work about conceptualizing content (Harris, 2012; Harris, 2014; Harris & Bain, 2011) by considering how ideological and cultural ideas impact this process.

A relatively unexplored but growing area of research in world history relates to settler colonialism and centering marginalized voices in curriculum and resources. Antoinette Burton's (2012) work suggests that teachers need to have greater awareness of how they approach the teaching of world history than specific content knowledge. She asserts that teachers need to be more thoughtful about how they present and shape the content. This combines with Dozono's (2020) work suggesting that world history curriculum must provide students the space to consider the ideology embedded in the content with which they interact. Moreover, Addou (2017) said that the textbooks in his study ignored non-Western contributions to history. All of this supports Megan Bang's (2015) assertion that Eurocentrism structures knowledge and sensemaking, although her work is not specific to world history, but rather decolonialization in science curriculum. Scholars such as Dozono, Conrad (2019), and Addou establish the need to look more closely, as this study does, at cultural assumptions that drive individual's instructional decision making in world history.

### **World History as a Subject**

As with many historical debates, there is not one clearly agreed-upon moment when the study of world history is born. World history as a subject can be traced back several centuries in

various forms (Allardyce, 2016). From origins in the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, this debate depends on who and how they define world history. Although global connections between places have been documented for centuries, for the purposes of this study, the definitions and framing of world history that I will draw on are more recent and rooted in the work of American historians. As Dunn, Mitchell and Ward (2016) explain, the ways in which world history is viewed in U.S. educational circles derives, at least implicitly, from U.S.-shaped ideas of study. With this in mind, I use the basic definition of world history from Patrick Manning (2003), an influential American Africanist, who explains world history simply, “as focusing on the historical connections among entities and systems often thought to be distinct” (p. 7).

The study of world history in the United States has grown steadily in the past few decades. Some discussion of world history occurred during and after World War I. Those discussions emphasized modern history overall and that the study of non-U.S. history should be limited to one year (Manning, 2003). While these actions by the Commission on Social Studies of the National Education Association show some attention to world history, the flourishing of the subject did not happen until the 1970s. The work of Leften Stavrianos, Marshall Hodgson, and Philip D. Curtin expanded the field (Lockard, 2016). Stavrianos, who published *A Global History: From Prehistory to Present* in 1970, wanted to expand world history beyond Western Civ; he suggested this could not happen without instructors having a different view of the past (Allardyce, 2016). Stavrianos, Curtin, Hodgson all agreed that world history was too Eurocentric in approach (Lockard, 2016). Their combined work pushed the field toward more global and comparative histories. Curtin along with William H. McNeill went on to form the World History



Association to support the professional development of the subject by academic historians, educational scholars and K-12 practitioners.

Between the 1970s and the present, substantial growth has occurred in the study of world history. The Big History movement (Christian, 2011) and Victor Ngoh's (1990) study of world history through Non-Governmental Organizations, as noted by Manning (2003), are among the newer non-regional approaches to world history curriculum. Additionally, the 1990s fueled the expansion of world history in K-12 settings through AP World History and standards movements (Dunn Mitchell and Ward, 2016; Manning, 2003). These shifts have resulted in increasing amounts of training and resources for teachers to address some of the challenges chronicled in the research in the previous section.

### **Globalizing American History**

As noted above, the subject of world history has experienced a great deal of growth and development since the 1970s. Still, while many world historians do not exclude the United States from world history it has rarely been the focus of their work. Conversely, in the past twenty years, a group of American historians have lobbied to infuse more world and global history into U.S. courses and study (Dunn Mitchell and Ward, 2016). The AHA has endorsed this work beginning with the "the LaPietra Report" presented by Bender (2000), the President of the AHA at the time.

In "LaPietra", Bender (2000) spoke of the importance of national histories as well as world history. Speaking on behalf of a group of historians who had met to discuss and draft the report, he noted that national histories were not to be supplanted by world history, but rather that the scale of national histories could not be understood without the context of a more global approach (Bender, 2000). He echoed the ideas of Kenneth Pomeranz (2016) who suggested that

historians have made use of nationalism in their work, but that nationalist ideas had also “made use of historians” (Pomeranz p. 591). Both these historians and many of their U.S. history colleagues had begun to question how the course of U.S. history could be understood if insulated from other concurrent histories. Guarneri and Davis (2008) offered an example of these connections by stating that the U.S. was an outpost of Europe and as a result, shares in its settler-colonial ties; this complicated past provides opportunities to muddle dichotomies created between the United States and the world.

American historians have continued to push for more global U.S. history work. Bender (2006) expressed that U.S. history cannot be separated from other nations and have meaning. To aid others in the work that Bender pushed, Guarneri (2017) offered a framework of ‘4 c-words’ to guide others: contexts, comparisons, connections and concepts. He added that consequences would be a fitting fifth word to help students of history to understand the interconnectedness of American and global history. In these ways, U.S. historians have attempted to globalize U.S. history courses and understandings.

This type of work has been broadly lauded and advised for world history courses as well. Bender (2006) states that world history courses do not include American history in the same ways that U.S. history courses lack world content. “The world is everything but us” (Bender, 2006, p. 6). Statements such as these are taken up by prominent world historian Stearns (1989, in Dunn, R. E., Mitchell, L. J., & Ward, K. (Eds.), 2016) who argued that world and U.S. history needed to be a two-way street with both leading into the other. For as much work as remains for the inclusion of global history in the study of the United States, there appears to be even less inclusion of the United States. into world history. Guarneri and Davis (2008) suggest that this separation is a product of a civic agenda that U.S. history teachers are asked to promote. This

emphasis on national history may also have spilled into world history through its strained inclusion of the United States in its standards and curriculum.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the field of social studies research through its consideration of how cultural ideas position and are positioned by teachers during instruction. While these teachers may view their practices as a pragmatic approach to teaching world history, one that is often overshadowed by a shortage of time and a wealth of content, they are also reacting to and/or reinforcing larger national narratives. Keith Barton and Linda Levstik (2003) noted that even when teachers value a certain topic, they will avoid it if they perceive that it conflicts with the teaching of content. This study offers explanations of how practitioners leverage broader ideologies in deciding how to act in certain contexts. While research suggests teacher avoidance of contested topics, there are still questions as to what guides those decisions and how teachers develop their identities in relation to them. This work gives a glimpse into how these practitioners explicitly consider their choices, but also the ways in which they are shaped by broader cultural narratives.

By using figured worlds to explore how these world history teachers balance various cultural narratives with the perceived constraints of their curriculum. Figured worlds has been applied in social studies education as a way to view how teachers balance personal identities and work identities (Robinson, 2007), but this study hopes to examine the ways in which a world history teacher's identity is framed by larger curricular debates and societal expectations of reinforcing certain national views. While many expect U.S. history courses to be a place to develop one's national civic ideas and understandings, world history courses also have the power to reinforce these ideas in subtle and implicit ways, but no less significant. By examining the role

of teacher identity around these ideas, this study hopes to consider the ways teachers reinforce and challenge nationally-held ideas of American exceptionalism and separation from the rest of the world but in the context of world history courses.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, I draw primarily on the frameworks of figured worlds and teacher decision making. The theory of figured worlds provides a lens to consider how the participants are shaped by and also shape their roles and the classroom discourses in which they are engaged. These teachers make decisions about what to teach based on their assumed identities which are influenced not only by present factors but also historically-rooted discourses. The participants operate within larger cultural conversations such as nationalistic ideas and cycles of isolationist sentiment in the United States, let alone the culture of the schools in which they teach. These forces and the choices teachers make in response to them allow for the types of instruction and experiences that their students have.

#### **An Overview of Figured Worlds**

A way to examine the situative nature of teaching and learning is through figured worlds. Figured worlds are “socially produced and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which a particular set of characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 52). As part of these worlds, actors participate in a small set of actions or present changes in a certain space or context (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). These participants are not only influenced by the space but also have the ability to influence it as well. As a result, individuals assume roles and identities in relation to the figured world in which they are involved. Dorothy Holland and Jean Lave’s (2009) interest in these relationships and activities focused on “how individuals develop in practice” (p. 5).

In developing figured worlds to understand identity construction in the field of cultural anthropology, Holland, William Lachicotte, Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain drew on the work of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin (Urrieta, 2007b). While they focused on Vygotsky's emphasis on cultural symbols being learned through social interactions, Holland et al. (1998) also drew on Bakhtin's work with specific practices, or the use of language and symbols. In doing so, Holland et al. centered individuals as social *and* cultural beings, instead of drawing on one school of thought. They also created space to study the improvisation and responsiveness that context can facilitate (Urrieta, 2007b). Through this emphasis on context and improvisation, figured worlds are never fixed nor do individuals react identically in them. As a result, the theory of figured worlds assumes that individual identities are always in flux and responsive to their surroundings.

Holland et al. (1998) established four characteristics that all figured worlds have:

1. They are historical phenomena that people are brought into or enter into. These are not things, but rather are "traditions of apprehension that gather up in us and give us form" as people interact with them.
2. They act as social encounters in which the positions/rank of participants have significance. These worlds are not "everywhere" nor are they for "everyone", some people never are part of particular figured worlds due to their position or rank.
3. They are socially organized and reproduced. In figured worlds, participants have different roles and relate to one another differently as a result.
4. They distribute people in relation to landscapes of action that are connected to familiar social types (pp. 40-41).

Importantly, as individuals become familiar with certain aspects of a figured world, they will sense how to engage with future moments. This is not to say that these figured worlds are stagnant, but rather are formed and re-formed over time. Figured worlds require interactions between individuals so that people can enact their roles and relate to each other over time through action within communities (Urrieta, 2007b).

By representing the figured worlds of world history instruction, I seek to understand how teachers shape the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world. I also explore how these teachers see their roles, identities and agency in the choices (actions) they make, and the discourses that they introduce through those choices. In any figured world, four elements are present (Holland et al., 1998): culture, community, artifacts, and power and privilege. These are outlined in the sections below.

## **Culture**

In figured worlds, culture and cultural means represent a standard plot or storyline. The figured world is not literal, but instead can be figurative, narrativized or dramatized (Holland et al., 1998). Still, while the figured world is “figurative”, it is also rooted in representations of past experiences. The worlds show recognizable patterns, but the storyline isn’t prescriptive although it is defined in relation to culturally-defined and understood elements. Holland et al. (1998) highlight how the Nuandada women of central Nepal were shaped in their domestic relations by a narrativized account of how a good woman lives her life. Reinforced by Hindu texts, the women used this path as a set for their own lives. These larger cultural understandings are part of the social process and ingrained in individuals. Holland et al. (1998) refer to history-in-person as a way to note that individuals are shaped by these cultural, historical patterns that they carry. These carried narratives become backdrops for the interpretation of actions or individuals

(Urrieta, 2007b). Much like the Nuandada women, teachers also operate within larger narratives of what it means to be good or effective teachers, both generally and within their subject. For example, world history teachers may assume that they have an obligation to teach parts of the world other than the United States and to do so through certain approaches. These teachers also carry implicit narratives about U.S. society that presumably impact the ways in which they frame the world and the relationships between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

## **Community**

Figured worlds operate between individuals within communities of practice (Holland et al., 1998). Communities of practice are defined by Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) as a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.” (p. 98). Lave and Wenger (1991) explored how individuals learn the social practices and complex activities of a group who help and learn from each other. Holland et al. (1998) do not conceptualize figured worlds as identical to communities of practice, but they do share similarities like engagement in shared activities and discourse. It is not enough to either be present or share the same job, but rather must participate in activities together. The participants in this study all engaged with students in ways that shaped the instructional decisions that they made. In some cases, they focused on characteristics of the present class or their collective impression of their students over time.

The communities can present in a variety of ways, both literally and figuratively structured. Holland et al. (1998) use the example of how individuals transition into Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and milestones. As a community, AA has standard artifacts and practices that individuals learn and from which they make their own meaning. These individuals may not at first understand the activities, but then by engaging in the community practices,



individuals internalize the figured world. Unlike the structured program of AA, Holland et al. (1998) also contend that these worlds can be imagined. They use an example presented by Benedict Anderson (1991) in which the author sees nationalism as a taken-for-granted larger cultural system taken up in a figured world. Anderson (1991) argues that nationalism creates a deeply-shared, common community. While Anderson's (1991) work used the context of nationalism, his research was focused on how the ideology offered a generic sense of community that was replicated through broader societal discourses.

Classrooms clearly offer a space to create a community of learners who share a common goal. These may have clear practices that, like those of AA, have a rhythm and routine to them, but also are influenced by larger, ideologically-rooted communities that manifest themselves in the discourses and activities occurring in those spaces. For the purposes of this study, I could not view the classroom communities, but instead rely on the participants' explanations and descriptions of those classroom interactions and communities.

## **Artifacts**

Artifacts play a significant role in how individuals engage with figured worlds. These artifacts serve as evidence of the figured world; they are used by individuals in their performance of the roles they adopt as part of the world (Holland et al., 1998). These artifacts serve as reminders and prompt individuals to assume their roles. Artifacts are developed outside of the individual, but individuals learn the value of them and even create personal connections to them. An example of an artifact is a poker chip in AA which is used as a physical reminder of the individual's commitment to sobriety (Holland et al., 1998). These cultural artifacts allow researchers to view the impact of social processes on an individual's roles and identities; these impacts are traceable through people's ideas as well as artifacts such as official school records,

essays, and photographs (Holland & Leander, 2004). Within this study, artifacts take the form of materials supplied by the teachers as part of the classroom activities and routines as well as the standards that the participants referred to as guiding their instruction. Significantly, these artifacts can only truly be attended to by recognizing their use in the practices of the figured world (Holland et al., 1998). Every resource that teachers discussed during the interviews was not an artifact as Holland et al. (1998) defined them. However, those that reinforce broader cultural narratives or classroom roles and identities act as artifacts in participants' figured worlds.

### **Power and Privilege**

The role of power structures is critical to the theory as well. Holland and Leander (2004) expressed that power dynamics are visible in the ways in which people are positioned to each other as well as within the hierarchies of institutions; the authors elaborated on this by saying that not all actors have the same access to spaces and challenge those structures differently as well. Holland et al. (1998) borrowed from both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu in their concept of power; they employed Foucault in an individual's agency to challenge authority while they borrowed Bourdieu's idea of separate social universes that have their own sets of rules. Social categories matter in figured worlds because they serve as a social reality that lives in these relations of power (Holland et al., 1998). Power and position are at play in all figured worlds and may preclude individuals from entering a particular figured world. In applying this idea to education, Rosemary Russ, Bruce Sherin, and Miriam Sherin (2016) explained that such theories position the individual teacher as part of broader systems across time and space. Individual teachers are part of the power structures present in the schools, though they may be adopted roles of authority in some cases and of a subordinate in others. World history teachers determine the

content that their students are exposed to in class, but also shape that content based on what they see as valued beyond their classrooms—the social and cultural capital that schooling is supposed to provide students. It is, however, important to note that the theory of figured worlds suggests that individuals can push against hierarchies and power structures to attain liberation from them (Holland et al., 1998; Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). Angela Calabrese Barton and Edna Tan (2010) noted that teachers can change their position, even novices, through their own use of agency that is born out of knowledge and practice.

## **Identity**

Unmistakably, figured worlds is a theory about identity. At its core, the theory of figured worlds focuses on what Holland and Lave (2009) referred to as “how individuals develop in practice” (p. 5). Their interest in these relationships and activities centered on how people develop their identities through day-to-day activities. Holland et al. (1998) argued that individuals commonly develop personal identities from roles and positions that align with a particular cultural activity. In this way, identities are rooted in the figured worlds in which they engage but also change as individuals adjust their roles in relation to the daily practices. Individuals shape the world around them while also being influenced by the world that they are helping to create (Holland & Lave, 2009). Through these interactions, an individual’s identity is constructed in relation to the spaces that individuals navigate and how they relate to others in those spaces (Urrieta, 2007b).

Holland, et al. (1998) describe two types of identities, figurative and positional. These identities are intertwined in many ways. Figurative identities are based on broad and basic “characters” and storylines (Holland et al., 1998). Positional identities are concerned with how individuals act relative to interactions with others in the figured world. Holland et al.’s (1998)

work focuses on positional identity, particularly in relation to the Nuadada women previously mentioned. This study focuses on positional identity. Just as Luis Urrieta, Jr. (2007b) explains identity as “how people come to understand themselves,” (p. 107), I am interested in how the participating world history teachers see their role and responsibility in showing the United States’ place in the world through their lessons and the extent to which larger cultural ideas such as nationalism and perceived curricular expectations influence that. It is important to consider how teachers understand that these identities cannot be divorced from their perceptions of their position and privilege in their classroom community (Holland et al., 1998). Similarly, it is necessary to acknowledge that teachers’ ideas about teaching world history develop through their own educational backgrounds and experiences as well as broader social contexts.

### **Narrative**

The individual defines his or her own figured world. The actor, in this case the teacher participant, explain and narrate the parameters of their world (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007b). This has significant implications in this study. The teachers explained their perceptions of their figured worlds and teaching of world history generally over the course of the interviews. While under other circumstances I might have recorded their perception through classroom interactions with others, we were confined to our series of interviews. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the participants shared their discourses about their world history figured worlds with me; they cultivated their narratives through the interview questions, prompts and their resources spontaneously. These conversations with me provided an opportunity for the participant to describe and explore their figured worlds.

## **Agency**

An element of figured world that Holland et al. (1998) do not explicitly address but imply is agency. Agency, in this study, represents the actions that the participants undertake of their own choice. Within figured worlds, an individual's sense of agency derives from their perception of their expertise and, as part of that, their community may have impacted this feeling. The participants expressed the freedom to make decisions about their instruction at several points in the interviews. Thomas, for example, commented that he felt supported to frame his world history courses thematically because he had the support of colleagues and administration. Another participant, Evelyn, stated that she altered the curriculum of her world history class to serve her students' needs. Her feeling of expertise derived from her perceived knowledge of her students. An interesting element of figured worlds is that the agency and expertise one feels do not equate solely with experience or longevity in the teaching role. Novices can and do have agentic potential (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010; Holland et al., 1998).

### **In Education, Social Studies and Elsewhere**

While Holland et al. (1998) articulated the theory of figured worlds in connection to their research in anthropology, figured worlds has been used to explore identity and agency within a variety of educational settings. Much of the research has been concerned with student identity although some focus their work on teachers. One criticism of the theory is that individual researchers use it differently (Urrieta, 2007b). Because the theory is abstract, all of its elements are not brought to bear in individual empirical studies. Others argue that it is exactly the abstract, potential complexity that makes figured worlds ideal for social and cultural analyses (Urrieta,

2007b). In this study, I am interested in world history teachers, but the ways in which others have employed the theory informs my work.

Classroom settings pose great possibilities for examining identity production. A fair amount of this has centered on student identities. James Greeno (2002) explored how different mathematics classrooms enable students to learn. Also grounded in mathematics classrooms, Indigo Esmonde and Jennifer Langer-Osuna (2013) investigated how student identities developed in relation to discussions; the worlds were both gendered and racialized but showed how one female African American student found a position of power in these discussions. Similarly, Kevin Leander (2002) studied the identity formation of an African American youth in classroom settings. These studies looked at student identities in relation to classroom cultures while Wendy Lutrell and Caroline Parker (2001) studied high school students to understand how broader cultural understandings of the positioning of school, work and family impacted their identities.

Other studies focus on teacher identity as mine intends to do. Urrieta (2007a) focused his study on how Chicano teachers became activists because of the identities they developed in response to the figured worlds of their work and communities. Focused on professional development, Bob Fecho, Peg Graham and Sally Hudson-Ross (2005) explored how professional development created uncertainty between figured worlds for teachers involved in the program. These researchers focused on the disruptions to and navigating of both figured worlds and teacher identities that surfaced through these particular experiences.

Although the above studies were not focused on social studies classrooms, Beth Rubin (2007), Cecil Robinson (2007) and Eve Mayes, Dana Mitra and Stephanie Serriere (2016) did center their work in social studies settings. Rubin (2007) and Mayes, Mitre and Serriere (2016)

looked at students within the figured worlds of an urban high school social studies and an elementary school classroom, respectively. Both examined learner identities and their development. Robinson (2007) studied a Chicana professor's use of revisionist history to develop critical thinking skills in pre-service teachers. This study specifically offers insights into how figured worlds can be cultivated to shift student perspective. All of these works highlight that the types of work that have explored the figured worlds of social studies classrooms and educators. This study focuses on four world history educators and how their identities and navigation of their classrooms' figured worlds shapes how the United States is presented in relation to world events and history. This study details the ways in which the figured worlds both influence these educators and also how these educators are influenced by their particular classroom setting.

### **Connections to Decision Making and Gatekeeping**

In the figured worlds of their classrooms, teachers enact roles and make decisions that influence the discourses and meanings whereby students participate. Because of the ways in which classrooms have innate power structures, the choices that teachers make determine how and what students learn. In turn, teacher decision making is affected by many contexts, ranging from one's understanding of the subject to one's understanding of self. Practitioner choices about what to include and exclude from the mandated state standards shape how the curriculum is delivered and what larger cultural messages are conveyed. These choices are often influenced by teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd, 1991), among other factors.

A teacher's orientation toward her subject matter directly impacts the decisions that she makes for her lessons and their enactment. Hugh Munby and Tom Russell's (1992) study

revealed that how novices learn to teach is affected by their understanding of the content. Some conceptualize social studies as disciplinary-focused, such as history, rather than an interdisciplinary effort infused with citizenship. Even within history instruction, many view history as segmented by nation, region, and era. Pamela Grossman, Suzanne Wilson and Lee Shulman's (1989) work reinforced this idea through their finding that an individual's conception of their content contributes to the ways in which teachers think about their subject and the instructional choices they make. Research on the teaching of history affirms these studies. Wilson and Samuel Wineburg (1988) found that subject matter knowledge and beliefs shaped history teaching for the four teachers in their study. Additionally, Catherine Cornbleth's (1997) study built on that finding by showing that teachers' historical understanding led to greater inclusion of marginalized groups in the U.S. and world cultures curriculum, especially as enacted through separate curriculum units rather than curricular integration. In this study, the participants' perceptions about how history is framed as well as their own history education may be important indicators of how they see the United States as part of their world history instruction. Most recently, Girard, Harris, Linda Kay Maygar, Taylor M. Kessner, and Stephanie Reid (2020) highlighted the importance of historical significance and connection to students' lives in teacher decision making.

Although much of this research is not recent, the challenges of teaching world history still reflect these findings. Specifically, teachers draw from world history curriculum that focuses largely on Western Civilization content that leaves out the largest populations of the world (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010; Willinsky, 1989). Curricular debates over what to include in world history go beyond content-specific questions. For example, Harris & Bain, (2011) found that the vast range of content poses obstacles for teachers in choosing what to teach. These studies



demonstrate the degree to which teacher choices are influenced by teacher beliefs and understanding of content.

Just as a teacher's disciplinary orientation affects their teaching, so too does their experience. Scholars do not agree on the role of experience in teaching which may reflect exposure to specific content as well as overall years of practice. Some scholars suggest that experienced teachers have more complex understandings of what they teach (Cochran & Jones, 1998), but others (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Butt, Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi, 1992; Clandinin, 1985) emphasize individual differences in teacher development. John Cochran and Shayne Jones (1998) found that experienced science teachers have more complete pedagogical content knowledge than inexperienced teachers who they studied; they saw that more nuanced and complex understandings were evident in their participants. The idea that experience in the classroom leads to a fuller understanding of content seems indisputable, yet within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) novices can have knowledge that will give them expertise and agency within a particular context and community. One then assumes that a novice teacher could be as or more willing to consider more global approaches to world history teaching that would include the United States as part of the curriculum. This study explores how these teachers construct discourses about the United States through their curricular choices.

Teacher decision-making takes on many forms, from the mundane details of classroom management to curricular choices. In curricular decision-making, world history teachers operate like other social studies teachers who function as "curricular-instructional gatekeepers" (Thornton, 1991, 2005). Thornton (2005) argued that curriculum reform has been unsuccessful because teachers act as gatekeepers and have become disconnected from the educational aims of what they are teaching. According to Thomas Misco and Jung-Hua Tseng (2017), the ways in

which teachers operate as gatekeepers is dependent upon the context in which they are teaching. Even in the face of a prescribed curriculum, mandated textbooks, and/or pacing guide and final assessment for world history courses in a school district, teachers enact the curriculum, making daily choices about what to emphasize or what to ignore or downplay. Moreover, Cornbleth (1985) notes that teachers play an important role in curriculum-in-use and can be seen as more powerful determinants than instruction documents and materials. Such choices regarding content and strategies affect student learning--not just learning about content but about the cultural ideologies and values that inform students' understanding of the United States and its relationship to other nations or regions of the world.

### **Opportunities within This Study**

In studying four world history teachers, I attempt to understand how teachers do and do not frame the United States through their instructional decisions. This discourse will be impacted by how the participating teachers understand their identity as instructors of world history, the enactment of larger cultural discourse about the United States and the exercising of teacher agency in shaping instructional choices. Within world history classes, both teachers and students may be part of figured worlds that result from studying the world's history through nationalist lenses that are part of larger societal conversations about American uniqueness or adoption of a more globally-oriented identity as part of the classroom culture. They, in turn, make decisions that shape the information and perspectives to which students have access. Through a lens of figured worlds that is informed by research on teacher decision making, I explore the ways in which teachers navigate these tensions.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This research project was conducted as a four-month qualitative study that involved interviews with four world history teacher participants and utilized the concepts of figured worlds and critical discourse analysis. This qualitative study focuses on the contemporary phenomena of U.S. inclusion in world history classes. Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell (2016) describe qualitative research as a “belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). The multiple phases of interviewing of this study allowed for reflective, in-depth conversation with participants. In doing so, the study focused on participant reflections on their decision processes, rather than on observed instructional delivery. The teachers taught sparingly and remotely during the study due to COVID-19 protocols. To examine this, I paired the framework of figured worlds with the methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Figured worlds is a framework to consider how individuals act in socially-constructed spaces (Urrieta, 2007b) while discourse analysis allows the interpretation of oral and written texts for form and function (Gee, 2004).

The following chapter is divided into three sections. The first explains the methodological considerations of using CDA that supported my figured worlds framework. I will explain the ways in which this combination impacted the collection, interpretation, and reporting of data. In the second section, I will outline the methods used in the study as well as discuss the limitations of it. In the third section, I offer an overview of the study’s context. I would also note that while I explain some generalities about the participants in the second section, I have included extended participant profiles in the next chapter.

## **Methodological Considerations**

This qualitative study draws on a macro approach to discourse analysis. I chose this method because of its usefulness in examining my theoretical framework of figured worlds. Figured worlds are constructed, typical stories (Gee, 2014). Yet, an individual's figured worlds are discernable through the ways they engage with and speak to others. Through discourse, individuals reveal the context and assumptions of his/her world. In this study, participants conveyed the assumptions and parameters of the figured worlds of their world history classes, as they saw them, through the interview process. This process necessitates a methodology that supports and complements the analysis of these nuanced texts. I found discourse analysis tools that were designed to either work directly with a framework of figured worlds (Gee, 2014) or to interpret the orientation and values of a particular discourse (Lemke, 2005). These tools allowed me to consider not just what the participants said on the surface, but rather the underlying issues and beliefs that were embedded in their commentaries. I wanted to understand far more in this study than what teachers said they did in world history and if the United States ever came up in class, although these are important too. Rather I wanted to engage with the teachers about their decision-making process and ask them to discuss their rationales and influences in so doing. Through the elaborate process of these interviews, their orientations and values toward world history and the place of the United States in the world became more evident and complex.

Many believe that discourse analysis only functions in the grammar of texts, and certainly it can lead to narrow linguistic deconstruction. But in this study, I employ an applied discourse analysis that encourages researchers to choose questions on topics that relate to issues and problems that are important to people and society (Gee, 2014). This approach allows the interpretation of oral and written texts for form and function (Gee, 2004). CDA can also

encourage researchers to choose questions on topics that relate to issues and problems that are important to people and society (Gee, 2014). This builds upon Norman Fairclough's (1995) definition of CDA as a social practice that reveals how social and political domination or power relations are reproduced. This conceptualization of CDA acknowledges the view that discourses involve competent speakers, writers, and actors who communicate with one another within and across their respective discourse communities (Rogers, 2004). According to Lemke (2005), social theories and discourse should help to explain each other, but often the social elements of discourse are left unexplored in this context. This study, to me, engages with an underlying cultural narrative in the United States, exceptionalism. It is often spoken of and used, but as Lemke implied, yet unexplored in this context. There were many challenges in wanting to do more than just know how the teachers planned, but rather in beliefs that guided their work. The participants were initially guarded but the repetition of questions coupled with evolving reflective answers allowed me and them to see beyond their early answers. The teachers were increasingly thoughtful about not just what they had done but own rationales for doing so. The teachers were more reflective about not just what they had done but also their own rationale for doing so.

My choice of discourse analysis came from the apparent connections to figured worlds mentioned above. From the framing of the study itself, a working understanding of figured worlds and CDA have shaped this research process and undertaking. This has meant focusing on understanding how the participants describe their identities and roles as world history teachers. As noted in the previous chapter, individuals engage in multiple figured worlds at once and adjust their roles and therefore actions according to how they perceive these worlds. As a result, I have allowed the participants to guide me through their decision making and explanation of the

communities and narratives that they see as shaping their decisions. Additionally, I have asked them to explore the value they place on these influences and broader views. This process has natural associations with discourse analysis because it relies on the ways that the participants communicate their figured worlds and relay deeply held societal beliefs and values, in this case about the unique character of the United States.

My emphasis on the longstanding cultural traditions that influenced these teachers in their roles as world history educators seemed a match for the types of ideas that CDA is used to explore. CDA is distinguished from other discourse analysis through its added focus on analyzing social practices (Gee, 2004). Elaborating on this fundamental element of CDA, Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (1997) added eight foundational principles that characterize the use of this methodology, including that power relations are discursive, the necessity of a systematic methodology, an acknowledgement that discourse is historical, and discourse is ideological in nature. In this study, the analysis of participants' framing of the United States in their world history courses through written and oral texts will highlight the ways the participants think about making instructional decisions. These explorations show how participant perceptions of culture, community and power and privilege impact the enacted curriculum. Specifically, I explore how these enactments reproduce cultural understandings of the U.S.'s role in the world.

Just as James Gee (2004) contends that learning is a social practice, the decisions, roles and identities of the participating teachers should also constitute social practices that can be considered through this methodology. This once again connects CDA directly to figured worlds. The theory of figured worlds seeks to understand "identities in practice" (Holland et al., 1998). Learning is a social practice, and therefore discourses about classroom practices constitute spaces to trace changes in participation and related identity (Lave, 1996). Language is a way to

recognize one's conception of identity. Klaus Krippendorff (2011) explains that discourses have unique organizations in which participants decide what and who is included as well as what is learned. The participants balanced the expectations of the discourse while sustaining one's own identity and, according to Gee (2004), they did so uniquely in context. In this way, teachers navigate the figured world of their world history classrooms differently than they might a different subject. These participants navigated not only the ways they thought about their roles as world history teachers, but also how they wanted to present that role to me in the interviews.

Whether or not teachers realize their role as curricular gatekeepers (Thornton, 1991), they have immense power over what topics are introduced into classes and how larger societal concepts are reinforced. While Gee claimed that the acquisition of social practices was separate from learning, others claim that these boundaries are less rigid (Rogers, 2004). Rogers (2002) specifically expressed the negative ideologies are regularly acquired in schools. Conversely, Lave (1996) suggested more positively that schools are organized institutions that can bring together a critique of society with hope for creating more socially just spaces. The roles that teachers assume, and their subsequent instructional decisions can shape how students interpret larger cultural understandings, in this case of the nation. As these authors suggest, schools present possibilities to help students and teachers to understand, critique and challenge society. But underlying this supposition is the reality that many teachers, including several of the participants in this study were still keenly aware that too openly challenging accepted ideas can draw pushback from parents, students and administrators.

One such ideology may be that of American exceptionalism or nationalist sentiments. In discussing the construction of public opinion, Krippendorff (2005) argued that public opinion is not some tangible artifact, but rather is a social phenomenon that is made real by the everyday

language that surrounds it. In the case of American separateness from the rest of the world, it is the language of uniqueness and exceptionalism that serves to reinforce this phenomenon. Krippendorff (2005) adds that “metaphors occur in language but achieve significance through their behavioral entailments” (p. 130). Although the idea of American exceptionalism is symbolic, it can be and was engaged through the decision making of participants in this study. These reinforcements and challenges were explored through the application of discourse analysis tools to the interview transcripts and resources provided during the interviews.

### **Method**

This qualitative study, conducted in the spring of 2020, included the interview of four world history teachers in a midwestern state to examine the phenomena of how they include the United States in their world history curriculum. This small -n (n=4) study allowed for in-depth data collection and time with each of the participants (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). Qualitative studies focus on phenomena in a natural context bound by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). According to Joseph Maxwell (2013), qualitative research is constructed and reconstructed, not just discovered. I framed my study by selecting teachers who all taught in a state which has a defined set of world history standards. This parameter was important that the case is bounded in this way as states have different standards and ways of organizing world history curriculum; this midwestern state, for example, is one of the few grouped into eras. By finding participants all teaching from the same state-sponsored curriculum, it offered some common understandings for this work.

In particular this study focused on two eras of world history instruction, An Age of Global Revolutions, 18th century -1914 (Era 6) and Global Crisis and Achievement, 1900-present (Era 7). While originally I intended to focus on material from Eras 6 and Era 7 material



on the World Wars 7 (Global Crisis and Achievement, 1900-present), I instead focused on an aspect of Era 7 (the Cold War) that all of the participants taught last year and one that none reached due to COVID. These choices were made to allow the participants to reflect on past and future teaching as the Cold War represented newer content that the teachers had not taught as part of their world history curriculum. It helps in understanding these teachers as a way to see how teachers more broadly might view the inclusion of the United States in the context of other challenges of teaching world history; by studying these four teachers, I will be able to generalize to explanatory theories about how world history teachers understand their role and the cultural beliefs that influence their decision making (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

One hallmark of qualitative studies is the use of multiple sources of data (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2014). While my original study had field observations, collection of lesson plans and handouts and interviews, my ability to collect such a range of data shifted with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closing of schools. As a result, I had to reconfigure how I could collect enough variety of data to meet this important standard. I did so by including my own prompts, resources, selections from the State standards, and requested lesson activities from my participants. My use of ordering and other elicitation techniques helped the participants to discuss issues they may see as evaluative of their teaching. This parallels Barton's (2015) discussion of techniques to ease controversial topics in research. Though this was more difficult for all of us without our normal access to our physical school settings, I was able to supplement my interview transcripts with rich resources and explanations from participants.

### **Data Generation**

Before I discuss how data was generated for the study, I will describe the original study proposed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was intended to have three phases of data

generation. The first phase was to involve a semi-structured interview with each of the participants involved in the study. The second source of data was to be field notes, lesson plans, unit plans (to the extent that they exist), and classroom materials from observed classes. I intended for the observations to include one to two units from World War I through the Cold War as determined by how the teachers divided their content into units. Finally, the third data source consisted of semi-structured follow-up interviews with each of the participants. These interviews were to last one to two hours in duration. I had planned to draw on the initial interviews and prompt the participants to reflect on the instructional choices that they made during the observations.

The enacted study drew on the ideas above but included significant changes and modifications due to school closures and modified instruction associated with the COVID-19 outbreak in the midwestern state in which the study was conducted. Statewide mandates closed face-to-face instruction in mid-March as observations for phase two began of the study. Additionally, the governor and Board of Education of the midwestern state suspended state tests for the 2019-2020 academic year and encouraged shifts in how teachers determined student grades for the spring semester. As a result, the participants of my study, and teachers throughout the state, did not have regular direct instruction with their students nor did they attempt to complete their curriculum as they had intended during our initial discussions of the study.

With this in mind, I made considerable alterations to my original plans. The first phase of data collection was completed in late February and early March, just prior to the statewide shutdown of face-to-face instruction. These semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and approximately an hour or so in length. We completed the first round of interviews in person at a place of the participants' choosing. Three of the participants chose their classrooms and one

chose to have the first interview at her home. The final three rounds of interviews were conducted via Zoom. They focused on how the teacher thought about world history broadly as well as planning and instruction for his/her world history classes. Topics included the participant's background in world history, how they decided on and selected specific content for a unit, how they considered including different areas of the world broadly as well as the United States specifically in their classes, how they decide on the duration of units, who and what influences their decision making, and what they perceive as their ability to enact the curriculum and explore topics that they want to teach (Appendix A). The purpose of these interviews was to understand the teachers' practices, influences on those practices, and conceptualization of world history curriculum. These interviews proceeded as originally planned. I briefly began observations of two of the participants, but it was clear in those few days of observations that we would be unable to continue the observations. The participants attempted to share some of their online platforms such as Google Classroom, but Google does not allow out-of-system participants to see classroom activities. Therefore, I would need to shift the study.

While the first phase of data collection proceeded as I intended, I shifted the other phases of data collection to interviews. I conducted three additional semi-structured interviews with each participant for a total of four interviews. These were conducted every week to two weeks through the end of May/beginning of June. Each of these three interviews focus on a particular era or part of an era. The second and third interviews focused on Era 6, An Age of Global Revolutions, with one focusing largely on the topic of global revolutions and the second centered on industrialization and imperialism, respectively. The fourth interview focused on Era 7: Global Crisis and Achievement, specifically the Cold War. These interviews used a variety of activities and materials to stimulate conversation with the participants (Barton, 2015). The particular

materials will be highlighted below. Each prompt and activity was intended to elicit how each teacher thinks about the planning instruction for his/her world history classes.

In the second interview, the participants prioritized events from the Age of Revolutions for their instruction (Appendix B). These included constitutionalism, communism and socialism, republicanism, nationalism, capitalism, human rights, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution. These terms were pulled from examples provided in the State standards about global revolutions and global interconnectedness. This interview protocol used the language of the state standards and the events listed above as a prompt for the participants to discuss how they make decisions about including certain events as well as how the United States, which was implicitly and explicitly included in the standards, factored into the participants' practices. The participants also answered questions about how the standards, colleagues and other factors influenced their choices. In all cases, the participants had taught this unit in its entirety prior to the pandemic.

In the third interview, the educators brought resources they used in teaching industrialization and imperialism (Appendix C). This interview also focused on Era 6, but the later part of it covering the Industrial Revolution and Imperialism . This activity represented content that the teachers had also taught during this school year, although for some it was during the shift to online instruction. As a result, in some cases, the participants spoke of instructional choices they were making due to the impact of COVID-19 as well as decisions that they might normally make. We also followed up by looking at the wording of the Era 6 standards so that participants could infer how they thought they had interpreted the standard in their teaching.

The fourth set of interviews focused on the Cold War (Appendix D). None of the teachers planned to focus on instruction of the Cold War during their world history courses this school

year but acknowledged that the newly adopted state standards would include more modern history such as the Cold War. For this interview, I sent the participants potential resources to preview and consider for use in their own classrooms. These resources included a variety of topics and types of texts, including recordings, video, and primary sources. While the second and third interviews were centered on topics that the educators had the opportunity to teach during 2019-2020, the fourth explored future choices that the participants might make. I also reviewed the transcripts of the previous interviews prior to this meeting and asked some follow-up questions based on individual participant responses. This fourth interview both contained new content but also served as the original follow-up interviews were intended to do, as an opportunity to reflect on all of the activities of the study.

I also included one additional meeting with each participant after their fourth interview. I shared their transcripts with the participants prior to the meeting to member check their interviews. They were given the opportunity to change any of their statements, but none chose to do so. I asked some final follow-up questions for clarification and also asked if they had any additional thoughts or experience at that time.

In each interview the teachers discussed how these events/materials connected to the state standards. The state standards served as both a common anchor for the participants and a pool of content from which to draw upon for the interviews. One unintended affordance of the way in which the study shifted the means of data collection was to allow participants to not only reflect on the materials of each interview, but to also comment on how their views may have changed throughout the interviews. Because the data were based on limited artifacts and extended interviews, the teachers were able to comment on their own changing perceptions or ways in

which they might change instruction moving forward. This may not have been the same without more extensive interviewing and only a pre- and post- interview as I intended in the initial study.

## **Standards**

The State standards guided the organization of the interviews. In this Midwestern industrial state, the world history standards were era-based. This means that they were organized around large thematically-linked time periods. An example is Era 6: Global Revolutions (State, 2019). This era included political, scientific and technological shifts over several centuries and locations. The eras had several standards with more detailed descriptions and suggestions of events or ideas on which a teacher might focus her lesson. In Era 6, one of the standards highlighted patterns of revolution, reform and nationalism between regions. This standard has many parts. The standard included a benchmark that suggests the teaching of Latin American and Asian revolutions (State, 2019). The eras helped to provide lenses for teachers and students, and also connected those lenses to a range of specific content. An advantage of this type of standard is the openness and flexibility often noted by the participants during the interviews. Because I focused each interview within an Era and set of standards, the participants and I were able to discuss specific examples and resources from their teaching or potential decision making. This helped to frame the conversations, content and questions that we discussed.

## **Data Analysis**

All of the interviews were transcribed using a mix of manual transcription and a transcription service, Rev. Even those that were transcribed by Rev were checked for accuracy and content. I used F5 transcription software to manually transcribe some interviews. The transcripts and any materials sent by participants were coded using NVIVO software after I read over the data several times to develop initial codes. In doing so, I used a mix of open and closed

coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Some of my initial categories included teaching background, influence and mentions of American history. During the various phases of coding, I developed additional parent codes including discussion of standards and views of teaching world history and child codes such as framing of world history and U.S. and world as separate (under view of teaching world history) and U.S. history as a frame of world history and prior knowledge (under mentions of American history). Through several rounds of coding, I identified relevant ideas in the reading of the data. These included themes related to content such as American history and also elements of figured worlds such as perceptions of freedom (to teach topics or approaches) as well as cultural narratives such as ways of framing world history (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

These codes draw on the ways the participant discourses framed their figured worlds (Gee, 2014). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note, the categories of my codes were responsive to the purpose and underlying goals of my research. While many associate discourse analysis with small grain analysis of sentence structure (Gee, 2014), this macro discourse analysis illuminates how participants drew on broader concepts in their decision making, either those related to the field of social studies or beyond educational circles. This process of analyzing the data was continuous and extended beyond the formation of categories (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) as I considered the types of narratives and macro-discourses presented through the interviews and materials (Lemke, 2005).

The coding and analysis illustrate the ways in which the participants applied their perceptions, both positively and negatively, of larger societal narratives to their teaching (Lemke, 1995). While Lemke (2005) refers to these in terms of the orientational meanings the participants assume, Frederick Erickson (2004) frames these larger narratives as global ecologies. In the use of these cultural themes, the participants are drawing these global ecologies into their local ones;

the participants are reinforcing not only societal concepts, but also the values, or orientational meanings, that go with them. This type of analysis draws on Lemke's (2005) overall framing of textual politics. Lemke identifies three overlapping meanings that texts, in this case the transcripts, have: presentational, orientational and organizational. In particular, I am concerned with the orientational meaning of the text. Lemke (2005) defines this by stating that "Orientational meaning includes all those aspects of meaning in a text or discourse by which it orients itself toward potential addressees, towards its own presentational content, and in the social system of heteroglossic discourse voices of its community generally" (p. 66) This meaning is centered in social relationships and the way that the subcommunities define their realities and those of others. Just as figured worlds and discourse analysis seeks to understand how culture influences the identity and roles of individuals, this analysis explores orientational meanings of the participants' interviews.

To illustrate my use of Lemke's approach, I will share an example of my analysis. In the last interview, Trey said, "Modern U.S. history is world history" (Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020). Trey's statement reveals the way in which he views the importance of the United States to the second half of the twentieth century. While the United States did play a large role in global affairs after World War II, Trey made a broader statement that not only privileges the role of the United States but also overlooks the contributions and impact of other nations and regions. Through the lens of orientational meaning, I can consider what the participants, in this case, Trey prioritized and valued. Employing Lemke's (2005) orientational discourse analysis, I was able to comment not just on the content that participants chose but also on how they depicted their own perception/significance of that content.



For the purpose of this analysis, I focused on macro-discourse analysis such as that shown above. Yet, it is particularly difficult to separate out the grammatical construction that participants used at times, a more traditional view of discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). This construction had to do with the use of the first person when referencing the United States. Although I did not do a detailed microanalysis of grammar for this study, participant references to the United States as “us” or “we” in the study provide insight into how the teachers may have implicitly or inadvertently included the United States in their courses in spite of attempts to limit U.S. content.

### **Researcher Positionality**

In all of these phases of data collection, it is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher. Before pursuing a doctorate, I was a middle and high school social studies teacher for seventeen years. For the majority of those years, I taught world history either in high school or middle school. My experience in doing so undoubtedly shapes my perspective in my research, particularly how I think about my own practice. Certainly, as a practitioner, I stressed certain areas of world history curriculum that I felt were significant and engaged in curricular gatekeeping as described above. My intention in working with these teachers is to understand how they think about their own practice, but that is not possible in a vacuum from my own experiences. This was evident (to me at least) in how I asked questions about the study of world history broadly as well specific content and approaches. My own experience as a world history teacher was possibly most present in the fourth interview and selection of the materials for the teachers. These selections represent my own interests and questions about teaching the Cold War as well as my understanding and perception of the types of resources that the participants had shared with me in the previous activity. I recognize that my experience and participations in the

interviews impacted both the answers to individual questions/prompts as well as the trajectory or development of the interviews generally. Because I earnestly believe that there are endless ways to teach history effectively, I endeavored to be open to and uncritical of the strategies that the participants used in their teaching. However, as a researcher, I also have an interest in critically examining the impact of how those strategies and decisions frame the United States as part of global society. As a result, I probed at ideas and methods that I may have as a practitioner related to but as a researcher wanted to ensure that the participants' reflections and choices were being recorded as opposed to my own.

### **Limitations**

This study both benefited from and was reduced by the data collection process. The interview process that became the basis of this study allowed for participant reflection that might not otherwise have occurred. Yet, while this study examines how these four teachers discuss and describe their decision-making process, there is no observation of how these teachers enact their instructional choices. This was the original design of the study, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was unable to occur. In this way, the study is focused on the teachers' perceptions of their lessons and not on the actual teaching of those lessons. Additionally, this study examines only standards that are from the modern era. This choice was intentionally made to ask teachers about eras and events in history where the United States was in the historical record. I might conjecture that the United States would be “present” in world history classes as a frame or reference point even when studying eras when the United States was not a sovereign nation, but for the purposes of this study, I only included time periods where the United States was a European colony or sovereign nation.

## Participants

Each participant for this study will be profiled individually in the next chapter. Each participant chose their own pseudonym for this study; each is referred to by the chosen pseudonym. The participants for this study all teach at least one section of a world history course in the same midwestern state. Three of them taught at least two sections. All of the participants were considering the newly approved standards (which were set for inclusion in the 2020-21 school year) as they approached their instruction but had additional challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways this changed their courses from March through the end of the year. Three of the teachers followed a chronological, era-based approach to their curriculum, while one teacher, Thomas, tried a thematic approach to his instruction that year. All but one, Evelyn, had taught high school world history prior to this year; Evelyn was a first-year teacher who also taught only one section of a remedial course for only one semester. Three of the four additionally taught some form of U.S. history during this school year.

There are some important general observations to note about the participants in this study. The first regards their certification. The State in which the teachers work has separate certifications for history and social studies. Social studies teachers can teach history courses, but history-certified teachers may not teach economics, geography or civics. The teachers in this study represented both certification paths. Evelyn and Thomas had social studies majors, while Catherine had a social studies minor. Catherine and Trey held history certification. The types of courses that the teachers took during their certification program may have impacted how they viewed historical study as Trey noted about his approach to teaching.

All four teachers identified as white and midwestern. Each was born, raised, and possibly more significantly for this study, educated in the United States. They all attended K-12

schools in the state in which they now teach. Only Trey teaches in the school district from which he graduated. While each participant drew on individual experiences in his/her decision making, these largely shared characteristics bear on a study centered on how the United States is part of world history classes. These teachers are United States educators teaching world history to students in U.S. schools. Undoubtedly these characteristics and personal histories impact the views and decisions of the participants, which might be different had they been born or educated abroad, or if they identified as a marginalized voice in U.S. society. Each participant is extensively profiled in the next chapter. These profiles are intended to overview the participants and offer an introduction to them through the lens of their own figured worlds.

### **Context of the Study**

When I defended my dissertation proposal in early February 2020, I had no idea what the next year would bring. The United States was already in political turmoil that had existed since at least the 2016 Presidential election. Unprecedented divisiveness, at least in my lifetime, plagued the U.S. political system and political divides between Republicans and Democrats also seemed to have developed into a bottomless gulf. The tensions and growing resolve of ultra-right nationalist movements had made international headlines throughout the world since 2016. The United States was far from alone in this political movement.

I knew of these tensions and had thought about them when considering this study and pondered how I had tried to address the growing conflicts when I taught world history and how current high school teachers navigated this as well. As I began to interview my participants with excitement to hear them and see them teach, a different crisis struck, the COVID-19 pandemic. Very quickly it became apparent that my study would change because the world and country were witnessing a pandemic the likes of which had not been seen in a century. Schools in the

state of my study, but across the United States as well, closed. At first it was suspected that they would reopen in a few weeks or a month, but that was not what happened. Due to a weak governmental response and resistance to quarantine restrictions, COVID-19 continued to spread globally, but worse in the United States. The teachers discussed in each interview (after the first) how uncertain they were about their classes, their students' wellbeing and when we would return to normal. There was a sense that normalcy would return in the fall. As my data collection and interaction with my participants came to a close, we all hoped for this return to face-to-face schooling in the fall.

As we now know, that return to normalcy did not occur in the fall, and as I write about the context of my study, the United States has not returned to normal activity or travel. Nor has COVID been the only event to challenge U.S. society since I collected data and started analyzing it. The United States has experienced a series of “explosions” rooted in the political divisions that I alluded to earlier. The Black Lives Matter Movement organized and supported protests across the nation to end police and societal violence against Black people in the name of countless victims like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Rioters invaded state capitals and their grounds to protest mask laws and other COVID restrictions they felt limited their personal freedom. President Trump suggested that the election would be stolen from him and then proceeded to contest results of states in which he did not win a majority of votes in order to stay in office. His posts on social media so egregiously lied about results that he was banned from the social media platforms that he had used to stir up supporters. Although President Biden was certified as the winner of the 2020 election, it was not without members of Congress in unprecedented fashion challenging the Electoral results. It was also not without the most unprecedented act of all, an insurrection in the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, the day

the votes were to be certified. All of these events in the context of researching and writing this study suggest that it was a fitting time for me to grapple with the idea of American exceptionalism and how world history teachers thought about the United States in their instruction. But as any student of history knows, it can be dangerous to try to comprehend the consequences of history as it happens, nor is this my intention with this study. It is instead my intention to do what I said, to grapple with the ways in which the United States is included in world history courses by teachers, to think about how these teachers tried to make sense of the world and this nation as part of it for their students.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Each participant is profiled below both in terms of his/her experience, school, and also through the elements of figured worlds: artifacts, community, culture, and power and privilege. This study is centered in the theory of figured worlds, but I have also chosen to present my findings thematically across the participants' experiences. As a result, it is important to ground the participants not just in their years of experience and the demographics of their schools but also in these elements, as described by them in the course of four interviews, informs their teacher identity in their world history classes. Because this study is interested in how broader cultural narratives impact the decision making of these participants in their world history classes, not all elements of the participant's figured worlds (as related to their world history teaching) will be equally explored in the following findings chapters. These profiles, therefore, serve as an overview of how the participants present their roles in this world.

As noted in the previous chapter, the participants explained their figured worlds through the four interviews I conducted with each teacher. While my intent was to have the participants explain their figured worlds in whatever terms they felt appropriate, my questions about who and what influenced their world history teaching likely impacted their answers. Certainly, a participant's figured world shifts and remains in flux (Holland et al., 1998). As a result, the participants' descriptions represent their ideas at the time of the conversation.

A final note about the figured worlds of all of the participants: the State standards in world history are an artifact that all participants refer to throughout the interviews. I have not included them below as an artifact that the participants brought because I, as the researcher, introduced the standards into the study. I believe that the standards would have been brought up

by all of the participants at multiple points in the interviews on their own, but I specifically asked participants to engage with and explain elements of the standards. As a result, the standards are an artifact that enters into each figured world and the decision-making process of the participants, yet not centered in the profiles below.

### **Catherine Tudor**

In Catherine's twenty-three years of teaching, she has seen the development of world history curriculum unfold in this midwestern state. Catherine has taught world history since the state formally mandated the course around 2007. Because Catherine has been teaching the course since it began, she has worked to transform a predominantly European-focused class into a more global course. She suggested that her standard world history class is more Western in content than her AP World History course which seems to downplay European history throughout.

Catherine recognized a value to globalizing world history curriculum and spoke of this often throughout the interview process of this study. She sought out professional development opportunities at a local university and through national programs to gain knowledge about regions of the world that she felt were lacking in her own education. When traveling through Europe when she was younger, she noticed how much she had to learn about a region she had studied, let alone those she had not previously learned about in school. Without world history classes as part of her own educational experiences, Catherine sought to bridge her own gaps in content knowledge.

As a world history teacher, she wanted her students to gain a window into the world that they would be part of. An important part of that for Catherine was helping students see similarities between themselves and others. During the first interview, she noted,



We're all globally connected, even as much as we want to be insular, we're definitely not. I teach, I think, with the end in mind so that kids have an idea that there's people outside of this country that are just like you and me. They want to have a family; they want to have a safe place to live (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020).

Catherine's goals for her world history students were rooted in this statement; she framed her teaching around the connectedness of the world that she saw her students working in upon completing their education.

Other than two long-term substitute positions, she primarily taught in one school district, Henryville. Henryville is a small predominantly white district (almost 90%) outside of a small industrial city. The area voted for Trump in the 2016 election, although neither candidate received over 50% percent of the vote. Conversely, Biden carried the area in 2020 with an approximately ten percent shift in the vote from the Republican to Democrat candidate. Interestingly, teachers in the district have received media attention for reportedly engaging in political issues in class. The high school, with its approximately 600 students, has been recognized in the state and nationally for its overall performance and opportunities for students. It offered a variety of AP classes, several of which Catherine has taught, and aimed to prepare students for four-year post-high school educational opportunities. The graduation rate is approximately 95% and almost 90% of graduates enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions.

As mentioned above, Catherine taught not just world history but also A.P. Psychology, psychology, sociology, U.S. history, AP U.S. History, a personal and global citizenship class,

A.P. U.S. Government, and A.P. World History. She also served as one of the advisors to the Model United Nations club.

While the above gives an overview of Catherine as a teacher generally, it does not fully describe the figured world of her world history classes. Her descriptions of the elements of her figured world spoke not just to her background above, but more specifically to her the context in which she teaches world history.

### **Community**

An important aspect generally and world history specifically of teaching for Catherine was community. Catherine defined her community in different ways. She spoke of her students and the type of members of society she wanted them to be both during and after they leave her classroom. As noted above, Catherine wanted students to relate to people across the world through similar goals and dreams, while recognizing that they would not all share the same opportunities. The role of her students and her aspirations for them was critical to the shaping of her content as a world history teacher.

The other influential member of Catherine's community was her colleague and former student teacher, Mary. As teaching partners, Catherine and Mary co-planned and used each other as guides. They bounced ideas off of each other regularly and while they did not always give exactly the same assessments or teach the same lessons, Catherine credited sharing ideas with Mary as important to her pacing and considering alternative activities than she might not otherwise. Catherine spoke of Mary as an equal in terms of planning. This was in part because they had been planning world history together since the beginning, so to speak. Mary was Catherine's student teacher one of the first years she taught world history, and they have been

working together as colleagues ever since. The influence and opportunity to work closely with Mary helps to define the ways in which Catherine teaches her world history classes.

## **Culture**

In our conversations, Catherine discussed a variety of ways in which broader cultural ideas impacted her role as a world history teacher. Catherine considered that the year of world history in which she taught her students reflected the last history class, let alone globally-focused class, that her students would likely have. This shaped the ways in which she wanted them to relate to the world and consider the global economy of which they would be part. She implied that students have far more access to national history than world history so she wanted to be certain that students left her class with a range of content knowledge that they could draw on to learn more. Catherine's explanation of cultural influences draws on a standard storyline that world history teachers use to signal the value and significance of world history.

## **Artifacts**

While the artifacts of Catherine's figured world might be more evident in observations of her classroom, Catherine shared materials from her world history classes, past and in the year of the study. She shared study guides for her Imperialism and Industrialization units, an excerpt from *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx, a movie guide for *Gandhi*, and a living sculpture activity Catherine uses with her classes while studying industrialization. These artifacts showed a mix of individual work that draws heavily on the district-supplied textbook and independently-created cooperative work. These artifacts revealed that Catherine uses a mix of individual and group work in teaching world history as well as an effort to supplement the textbook which she considered to be Western-dominant.

Catherine's artifact choices revealed a tension in her teaching. This tension existed between using the common text that students had at their disposal and her own desire to broaden student experiences beyond a Western-centered world history course. Catherine identified her textbook as an organizational and pacing tool that touched upon many of the State standards that she felt required to teach. Additionally, the district furnished every student with a textbook, so for Catherine, the textbook served as a leveler to which all students had access. Catherine still attempted to supplement resources and offer students more than the textbook contained, but the textbook was central to Catherine's planning and decision making.

### **Power & Privilege**

As can be said for all of the participants, Catherine had certain privilege to choose what she teaches. As she expressed throughout the interviews, she felt that her choices were limited by student access to materials, state testing and district expectations. Her district prided itself on student achievement through state and national recognition. As a result, she felt some pressure to adhere to the resources and standards she had. She did acknowledge that she had freedom within the state standards as to what and how to teach and did in classroom discussions broaden what students might glean from the textbook-based activities.

As an experienced teacher, she drew on her own educational and teaching experience which undoubtedly is a form of power. This is centered in her own educational experiences as an undergraduate history major, some international travels, and a recognition of a largely western and U.S. history background. Catherine leveraged her education and professional development in her instructional choices, intentionally and unintentionally. Her long-time presence as a teacher in the Henryville community also afforded her the opportunity to plan activities and discussions with students about current events. She did feel that this particular element of free student

conversation was lessened during the study because of online instruction. She felt her ability to engage in meaningful discussion was diminished in a non-face-to-face setting. This spoke to the ways in which Catherine felt she could run discussions and relate student comments to current topics within her classroom setting. Her knowledge that others might hear only parts of conversations online made her uneasy about this loss of classroom community and her ability to direct conversations.

Another element of power that is worth noting is that Catherine's district has conservative elements that add to her concerns above about online conversation versus classroom discussion of topics and connections to modern events. While she was a well-known teacher in the community, she commented that having to switch to online instruction made her a bit uneasy about being misunderstood by those listening in although she did not fear that in her physical classroom. She perceived that she had far less power to carry on classroom discussions than she felt was typical in her district. She believed that she did not have standing and authority to combat criticism that parents might exercise if they saw her comments as politically motivated.

### **Evelyn St. Pierre**

In Evelyn's first year of teaching, she was assigned a single one-semester section of a remedial world history course with approximately thirty students. Evelyn had only the second semester of the world history course which ninth graders take in her district, Lakeland. Lakeland has one building with eighth and ninth grades and the high school houses grades ten through twelve. Because of this structure, Evelyn taught these tenth graders who had otherwise matriculated to the high school for their courses. According to Evelyn, this course was not a regularly scheduled class, nor did she anticipate teaching it the following year. Her students were expected, by the school and her world history colleagues at the middle school, to pass the

common assessment that the other world history students take. This assessment was given in parts at the end of each unit in the form of a short answer question or questions depending on the unit.

In addition to this course, U.S. history courses comprised the remainder of Evelyn's teaching load. She did have a few overlapping students who she taught in both courses although she did not feel that the overlap of students directly factored into her inclusion of the United States content in her world history class.

Evelyn's previous experience with world history was taking a world history course in high school that she said did not leave a lasting impression on her and teaching middle school world history content during her student teaching year. She wanted her students to remember what they learned in her class more than she did from her high school experience with it.

Lakeland, the high school that Evelyn taught in, was a rural high school well outside a major urban area. In both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, the district's voters favored Trump by margin that increased over these four years by about 10%. The school has approximately 1,100 students and is approximately 94% white. As noted above, Evelyn taught in the high school which serves grades ten through twelve. Students do occasionally go between buildings for classes, but typically tenth through twelfth graders stay at the high school for all instruction. Lakeland had a free and reduced lunch rate of almost 38%. The school was focused on increasing college readiness of its students. The administration aligned this goal to improving state test scores in mathematics, writing and reading. The district had a graduation rate of around 90% with most students continuing to post-secondary schooling.

## **Community**

As a novice teacher, Evelyn was adjusting to all new courses than she had taught before. In general, her U.S. history colleagues had a great deal of influence on her teaching. Most of her classes were U.S. history. Evelyn commented that this reality and the proximity of these teachers to her own classroom meant that she planned more with these teachers and did many of the same activities. As for her experience with world history, her fellow world history educators were in a different campus which meant that she did not have daily interactions with them. She did have materials, a pacing guide and assessments from the world history teachers, but Evelyn commented that she was more willing to set off in her own direction in world history.

This physical distance helped to define Evelyn's sense of community, but it was not the only factor in shaping her sense of who was significant in her figured world. The most significant aspect of the community for Evelyn's role as a world history teacher was her student population. Evelyn was responsive to and interested in how this particular population of students could succeed in her class. She was aware that these students had not been successful in their previous world history experience and that her resources represented that experience. As a result, the students were central to how she saw her role and the way she made decisions about how to teach world history to this group of students.

## **Culture**

The cultural elements that influenced Evelyn's role as a world history teacher were multi-layered. One element of the culture builds from the community in which Evelyn's class was situated. As the teacher of a remedial class, Evelyn wanted to help students find success in a course in which they had already failed; this has its own relationship to Lakeland as so many students had failed the course that the administration adopted a remedial approach that they did

not normally have. Additionally, Evelyn stressed connections between world history and U.S. history hoping to build on what students might already know either from previous classes or outside knowledge. Evelyn assumed that U.S. history might be more familiar and help students to connect to more foreign material.

Evelyn, as a result, was not resistant to bringing ideals and narratives about U.S. history into her world class regularly. She did recognize that she was teaching a world curriculum and needed to stress global history but saw broader understandings of U.S. history as helpful in framing it.

### **Artifacts**

When Evelyn spoke of the materials she brought into her classes, she related them to the activities with which they were paired. Evelyn was teaching only one section of world history and one that was remedial in nature. Her artifacts reflect the experiences of her students. The artifacts she shared during the third interview were resources from her district textbook. They were study guides that had shortened readings and highlighted vocabulary students would be expected to know. Evelyn chose these resources because of their reading level and clarity. She felt these simplified the content and ideas suitably for her students who had not been successful with more elaborate guides and readings the year before. She paired these artifacts with activities such as review games and a simulation called the urban game. Evelyn explained that she made decisions based on what she believed her students needed to succeed. Evelyn saw the materials and unit assessments provided by her colleagues as artifacts that reinforced ideas of what she *should* teach.



## **Power & Privilege**

As with all teachers, Evelyn traversed a variety of structures of power. Within the context of her world history course, she felt authorized to make curricular decisions in her students' best interests, but she also was beholden to the course expectations that her world history colleagues had. These expectations took the form of shared unit assessments. Evelyn referenced these assessments when preparing her lessons. She did not feel particularly responsible to her colleagues as she did her fellow U.S. history teachers but did want to be certain that the students met the course requirements. Her power in this instance intertwined with her sense of place. This offered Evelyn a certain privilege that she would not have had under normal circumstances in the larger hierarchy of her department. The materials and expectations of her colleagues reminded her that she did not have full freedom in what she taught in her classes, but COVID had temporarily changed that.

After the COVID-19 outbreak, Evelyn's students and therefore Evelyn were no longer bound by the common assessments. With the tests suspended for the year, Evelyn changed her instruction. She framed her instruction around her students' preferences and needs. She already felt a greater sense of agency with her world history class than her U.S history ones. Evelyn's sense of authority in her world history classes was greater, seemingly due to physical distance from her colleagues initially as well as the outbreak of COVID-19.

## **Trey Lennon**

Trey Lennon's twenty-one years of teaching have been spent in two districts. All but a couple of years of his teaching career have been spent at White Cedar. Trey's career and education had been completely in the White Cedar area. Trey attended White Cedar High School himself and was proud to have spent his teaching career in his hometown. He has instructed

some form of world history throughout his career and has also been teaching U.S. history for the past several years. Trey discussed that he has history certification and considered himself to be a history person as opposed to social studies.

Trey enjoyed the teaching of history, both U.S. and world. He centered his teaching around technology use, making the transition to online instruction with COVID easier. He spent a great deal of time preparing presentations for students that were visually appealing and meant to draw students into the study of history. He lamented that students did not have the interest in listening to full class lectures but hoped that his self-paced presentations would stimulate student thinking. Trey not only used these presentations in his own classroom, but he sold them on a website for teachers and shared them with others in his department.

Trey was part of a sizable social studies department at a large high school. White Cedar is a suburban school district. The area around the school had an industrial tradition that has waned in recent decades. In the 2016 election, the area voted narrowly for Clinton (47% to 46%) but shifted more decisively toward Biden in 2020. Trey commented throughout the interviews about a feeling of contentiousness around political issues. The presidential voting in 2016 might provide evidence of his feelings. Still, voting statistics in 2020 suggest that while still conflicted the district did shift toward democrats marginally. The school district had remained an affluent area in spite of the economic downturn of the area. The school had below 30% free and reduced lunch and an over 90% graduation rate, with 96% enrolled in two or four-year programs. The high school has over 2,500 students. They offered extensive Advanced Placement courses to their students. Like the first two participants, Trey's school is a majority white high school although his district was closer to the state average at 27% non-white.

## **Community**

Trey's social studies department had a strong sense of camaraderie and collegiality. Trey spoke often of the impact and importance of his colleagues on his daily work life. His colleagues congregated every morning to catch up, both personally and professionally. They used these few minutes to check in with each other and see if they were on pace curricularly. Trey spoke often of his department's helpfulness to one another and the leadership of the department chair. Trey felt that the department chair helped keep him and his colleagues attuned to shifts in state standards. He valued the ways in which this group of colleagues served as guides for one another. Trey willingly shared materials with his peers and admired their dedication to teaching. He did, however, have a strong sense of pacing of material on his own. He believed that he could not take up "passion projects" and needed to make certain that he progressed through the curriculum. He viewed himself as a member of the team, but also served as a model of covering the curriculum.

Trey also spoke of his classroom as a community. While his colleagues helped him to pace his class, gather resources and delve into content, Trey also sought to meet the needs of his students. He felt his students had changed over time with greater dependence on technology and less stamina for lectures which Trey himself had enjoyed as a student of history. He strove to teach his students as best he knew how, noting that if he discovered a better way to connect students to material he would adapt to do so.

## **Culture**

Trey noted in the last interview that he "was an American teacher teaching American students in an American school" (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020). He recognized that these cultural elements impacted the way he made decisions in his classroom. Importantly,

Trey was also a product of the White Cedar community in which he taught. He understood and leveraged the industrial past of the region and tried to relate his content to the experiences of his students' families. As part of the industrial Midwest, Trey saw the place of America in global production and acknowledged that the U.S.'s role had changed. He was concerned by possible recent changes to the global status of the United States, but he inferred that he tried to remain politically neutral with his students. He believed that it was not his place as a history teacher to impose his views. He challenged his students through presenting information and facts about the past. He also saw "modern world history as U.S. history" (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020) because of the significance of the United States globally since World War II.

### **Artifacts**

Trey had spent an enormous amount of time creating learning materials in the past several years. The materials he shared represented a few of the self-guided presentations that he meticulously researched, organized and crafted to be visually appealing. The PowerPoint presentations featured photographs, maps, charts, illustrations and graphs about the content that Trey was conveying. In an Imperialism presentation, Trey included a map of Asia as divided by colonizing nations as well as political cartoons about the White Man's Burden and resources about imperial Japan. In another, he included slides that highlighted American Imperialism in Latin America and Hawaii. His attention to detail was so great that he chose background colors that he felt went with the era. He shared an example of a presentation about the 1970s in the United States that had a brown and mustard yellow background meant to invoke the feel of shag carpet. These presentations served as artifacts that reinforced Trey's beliefs about his students' learning as well as visually represented his broader historical understandings.

The artifacts correspond to a section of the textbook that Trey's students use. Trey disliked the textbook arguing that it didn't contain enough content. This served as the impetus for him to create these presentations that could be self-guided as he often used them or as the beginning of class discussion or lectures. The slides had questions that were specifically linked to certain pages in the textbook. In spite of his dislike of the specific textbook that his students had, Trey felt that it was important to draw on the textbook as a common denominator of sorts for students. If students were absent, Trey viewed the textbook and his presentations as a way for students to not miss out on material.

### **Power & Privilege**

Trey envisioned teachers as people who guided students and imparted carefully researched and trustworthy information to them. Teachers, to Trey, have an obligation to be unbiased. Through these characteristics, teachers have status in their classrooms. For Trey, teachers direct their students' learning and are empowered to make decisions about what students should and need to learn. This authority derived from a teacher's attention to the resources with which they are provided as well as the exercising of their professional development. Trey appreciated the structure of his department and school in reinforcing this hierarchy; he saw himself as the decision maker in his classroom, but within the guidelines and parameters of his department and high school administration. Trey's interviews centered around his perceptions of power and where he saw himself as fitting into the hierarchy of his school. He saw himself with less power and control than administration but as above students. He spoke of hierarchical structures more than his fellow participants did. He presented a fairly traditional view of school power structures and his place in them.

## **Thomas McCririe**

Thomas started his tenth year of teaching with a new approach to his world history class. He approached the course thematically. Although Thomas had taught world history previously, both as a teacher and as a student teacher, he had decided to try something different than he had before. Thomas, in collaboration with his colleague and former mentor teacher William, mapped out a non-chronological approach to the curriculum. The units included historiography, human organization, ideology, conflict and revolution, subjugation and class struggle, and globalism. Throughout the units, different eras and regions were brought in as Thomas and William thought appropriate.

This was Thomas's third year of teaching world history and he felt that this approach made the most sense; he believed students struggled to make connections across space and time when world history was taught chronologically. Making connections between historical events and ideas drove Thomas's teaching. He felt that activity-based and thematic learning made these connections more likely, rather than the standard linear approach to studying history. This draws on his own experience as a learner and what he remembered from his own history education which generally were particular simulations or hand-on activities. Thomas approached his own teaching with this in mind.

Additionally, he felt that as long as he could justify why he thought an activity would benefit his students that he could and should do it. His school district emphasized meeting the needs of his diverse learners as opposed to achieving the highest test scores in the area. Thomas taught at Woodbridge High School which was a suburban school of just over 1,000 students. The school was one of the most diverse in the state and has a majority minority population. The district drew heavily on school of choice students, many from a nearby urban area. Thomas

spoke often of what he saw as the need to relate to the students whom he taught. Thomas stated that he tried not to share his own political views in his classroom but did want to leave space for his students to share theirs. The Woodbridge district claimed a majority vote for the Democratic candidates in both the 2016 and 2020 Presidential elections. The margin of difference was at least ten percent in both elections. This fact may have helped Thomas feel that his classrooms were less contested than others in more polarized settings in relation to political conversations. His classroom as noted was among the most diverse of any participants’.

Woodbridge had the largest percentage of free and reduced lunch of any of the schools in this study at over 40% of students coming from qualifying homes. Woodbridge had provided free meals to all students for approximately two years at the time of this study. The school is at around the state median for graduation rates (almost at 90%). The school administration focused on preparedness and enrollment in post-secondary education. The percentage of their students enrolled in post-secondary programs was just over 50%.

## **Community**

As with all of the participants, community for Thomas meant different things. As mentioned above, his diverse student population mattered to his teaching of world history. Thomas wanted his students to not only connect current circumstance and societal shortcomings to historic events, but to learn from the successes and failures of history. He saw the opportunity for students to critique modern society as a way to encourage activism. In this way, the students of Thomas’s classroom were a critical component to the community he sought to both be part of and serve.

Another facet of Thomas’s community was his colleagues. William, his mentor teacher during student teaching, and Thomas exchanged ideas regularly. They did not construct all

lessons to be the same but touched base on units and co-constructed the thematic approach to the course. They often planned special speakers and opportunities together or at least included each other's classes. There was a third world history teacher at Woodbridge, and while that teacher chose a chronological approach to his course, Thomas and William did share ideas with him as well.

Thomas had another collaborator in his thinking about his world history courses: his partner, Melanie, was a teacher in another area district. Melanie also taught some sections of world history. Thomas said that while Melanie taught very differently than he did and in a district with different emphasis on state test scores than his own, that he would borrow and reshape ideas from her. He viewed Melanie's strengths of organization and meticulous pre-planning to be different than his own but appreciated listening to her ideas and experiences so that he might be able to draw on them as appropriate to his students.

## **Culture**

Thomas identified less as a world history or a social studies teacher than simply as a teacher. Thomas believed that no matter what subject he taught that he was preparing students for their futures and to actively engage in society. While one might argue that these are central goals of teaching social studies, Thomas saw them as more universal--although he agreed that these were tenets of social studies education. He embraced the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy in that he believed teaching his students meant framing his content in the diverse traditions from which they came. He was proud of and believed in the mission of his school as promoting and fostering the many cultures that his students came from, a more accurate vision of the American society than many of the districts that surrounded his. Yet, Thomas also acknowledged as the interviews continued that he was still rooted in his American upbringing



and some of those ideals were reflected in his emphasis on the many cultures and ethnicities in his classroom. Yet, he also believed in dispelling some of those idealized narratives that American society had realized its vision of equality. Thomas' desire to encourage students to question the ideals associated with the storyline of American exceptionalism framed his thinking and engagement with his students.

### **Artifacts**

Thomas shared activity-based artifacts that were in line with how he discussed his philosophy of teaching. These included journals and a living sculpture activity. Thomas preferred to change his activities regularly and did not always use the same activities year to year. He did always emphasize access to materials online as his students did not have textbooks at their disposal. His district did not hand out textbooks, although there was a classroom set available. With this in mind, Thomas sought materials that he thought were at appropriate reading levels and free access. Thomas did not create all his activities from scratch but spoke of co-creating or adapting materials with colleagues, his partner or from online sources.

### **Power & Privilege**

The hierarchies of schools are evident in how each of the participants discussed their roles. Thomas is no exception. Woodbridge's hierarchical structure was present, but according to Thomas somewhat blurred. Thomas felt supported by his administration to make decisions that he saw as beneficial to his students. Thomas explained that he felt he could go to his principal, a former social studies teacher, for support with students and parents or to discuss approaches to his curriculum. Thomas said that his administration, both at the high school and district levels, encouraged teachers to try new approaches as was evident in his use of themes.

In his classroom, Thomas also saw the lines of power blurred as he wanted students to help direct where class conversations and activities led. He saw his role as offering students choices in their learning and giving direction to conversations, but he believed that he shared guiding the class with his students. In many ways, he viewed his teaching situation as privilege especially in relation to others he had known.

These profiles serve to introduce each of the participants as they saw their own teaching and purpose. By presenting them as individuals, I can now compare their experiences and look for commonalities and differences among them. In the next three chapters, I highlight how they considered and taught about the United States in their world history courses. In the next chapter, I describe the participants' considerations for including U.S. content in their world history courses. These considerations highlight both the teachers' broader understandings of world history as well as how the United States fits into these ideas.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONSIDERING THE UNITED STATES' INCLUSION

In this chapter, I explore how the participants discuss the inclusion of the United States generally in their world history courses. In some ways, this involves how the participants made decisions about any and all content that they incorporated into their world history classes. In other ways, the United States presented a very specific country/region that is not often foregrounded in world history classes in the United States. In contemplating the place of U.S. history in a world class, these participants shared their own understanding and beliefs about how the United States fits. These understandings were grounded in what it means for each of the participants to be in the role of a world history teacher. As Holland et al. (1998) suggest, individuals take on situative roles that are informed by how they see their identities in that space and time. For these participants, their answers would likely change if they were considering their place as a civics or U.S. history teacher. In the role of world history teacher, other expectations and influences weighed on the participant responses. This reflects the multiple figured worlds that individuals negotiate, and also the ways that *these* participants viewed their role and obligations as world history teachers.

In the following pages, I consider the variety of ways that the participants explained their choices and how it reflected their identities as world history teachers. These choices mirrored both narratives about the role of the United States in that history and their concerns over limited world history instruction in the lives of their students. In examining these choices, I explore how the participants initially described the weight of time constraints on including the United States content in their world history classes. I then discuss how the participants' shifted their stance on ways they did draw on the United States as content in their world history classes. After those

considerations, I discuss how the participants framed world history and the United States as part of it through their own learning experiences. Another lens that the teachers employed in their decision making was a type of presentism in which they considered the modern world in deciding what content to highlight in their lessons. In all of these rationales, the participants showed how their deliberations were a complex blending of cultural and community expectations. They also implied how these ideas were reflective of the identities they assumed and roles they fulfilled as world history teachers. In the final part of this chapter, I consider the implications of these rationales for world history teaching generally.

### **General View of World History**

Those who teach world history face the difficult task of balancing vast amounts of content and framing that information so that students can make sense of it. The participants in the study were no different. Before one can delve into how these teachers consider the United States' place in world history courses, it is helpful to understand how the participants think about framing their world history courses generally. In so doing, it is easier to see how their approach to the United States followed or detoured from their overall perspective.

In summarizing their purpose for world history instruction, these teachers wanted to help students make sense of the world around them. The teachers felt a duty to prepare students to engage in the world in which they live and saw an understanding of world history content as a way to do this as well as create lifelong learners. Trey explained both of these priorities through advice he received as a novice teacher, "What you should hope is that you teach them a valuable curriculum that will shape how they view the world and make them excited about learning more. Then they will spend the rest of their lives doing that" (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Catherine voiced a similar goal, "I just want them to be a little more globally aware. The

fact that there's other places besides [this school]. There's other places outside of [this state]" (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020). Both Trey and Catherine saw world history instruction as something that stretched students' view of society and their connection to the world as a whole. Thomas also said that this global perspective is what makes this course different from others, "There's something about just the definition of it being a world history class. That my goal is to teach about everything that is outside of their current frame" (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020). The study of world history for these participants was an opportunity to shift what students thought about and perceived as the scale of their worlds. These goals seemed aspirational in many cases as opposed to ones rooted in current events that might be considered more political in nature.

The course and study of world history was also made up of patterns that students could learn and apply to their surroundings. As Trey noted,

I truly want my students to understand the world that they are about to inherit. In world history, that goes deeper into the foundations of organized religion, through the development of Europe and events like The Black Plague, and the Age of Exploration, and conquest and colonization, and the Slave trade and all of these patterns that help explain their current existence (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

As with other history courses that the participants taught, they wanted students to view that past as a way to understand present and future. It was in the application of what students learned in world history that seemed important to these teachers. Catherine, Evelyn and Thomas also stressed that world history uniquely situated the students to learn about other cultures and to see

similarities and differences, to see how others had attempted to solve problems. Trey spoke of this in terms of progress made and challenges remaining in society:

That's my hope and goal, is to help the students that I am charged with helping better understand the world they live in and why the successes we've had, all the things we should be proud of, how we got there, and the problems that we still have and the issues we still need to address. Why they're still out there, and the patterns and so on, and how we got there.... these patterns, what we can learn from them, what we should learn from history. That's what I truly believe, because I'm a teacher at heart. It's not just what I do, but I'm also somewhat passionate about history and what we can learn from it. I believe in that(T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

Trey's passion for applying historical understanding guided his teaching generally, but in world history allowed for a broader set of patterns to explore with his classes. Trey emphasized that teaching *history* was part of his identity as an educator; he was not social studies certified and therefore believed this distinction was part of his role in and approach to his world history classes. Thomas was also focused on what knowledge students could transfer to other situations:

The whole goal with world I think is to try to find those patterns so that they can apply them to those situations in other cases. So, when I teach imperialism, I always take two or three big examples. But the goal being that if you hear about imperialism somewhere else, you can probably piece together that there was some kind of

subjugation of the people (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020).

The participants all expressed that world history was the place for this kind of learning, a class where the United States was not featured, one of the few social studies experiences that students might have where this would be the case. World history, for these participants, suggested a learning situation that did not directly include the United States or at the very least center the U.S. history in its content. This seemed an ideal embedded in the cultural storylines of world history instruction in the United States, the idea that world history implied an emphasis in subject matter that focused away or even avoided teaching about the United States. This was a plotline that permeated each of the participant's discussions.

The participants all clearly stated that teaching world history was also about broad coverage. The range of content was an important aspect of the course. That range also required careful choices to be made about content. Catherine, in particular, suggested that, "I'm always striving for more content that's outside of Europe and outside of North America. [I'm always] looking for more South American and Central American history, more East Asian history prior to European attempts at colonization" (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020)

For Catherine, Evelyn and Trey, the range of content referred to regional coverage, as it does for many world history teachers. This consideration given the number of years of study and the number of regions of the world is not an unusual or even misplaced concern. Yet, the breadth of the course can also shift the approach. Thomas believed coverage was about a range of content, but also a focus on how that content was used. Thomas emphasized that he tried to create projects and not ask students to memorize facts or timelines. He wanted his students "to conceptualize in some way. Part of what history is, is about stories and to really understand the

effect this had on people of the time or even on people afterwards” (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). This led Thomas to view world history through themes. While the other participants were more comfortable with a chronological approach to the content, they shared with Thomas a belief that world history required a wide lens.

### **Own Education as Impacting Their View of World History**

Regardless of how long the participants had been teaching and their own experiences as a learner shaped how they thought about world history generally, and specifically the United States’ place in it. Two clear themes emerged as the participants’ discussed their own educational experiences: 1. the participants’ own limited learning of world history impacted their comfort and approach to content, and 2. participants drew on their own secondary experience as motivation for their own approaches. These themes were unsurprising. Wilson and Wineburg (1988) noted that a teacher’s familiarity with and exposure to historical knowledge impacted their nuanced instruction. Harris and Bain (2011) and Harris (2014) referenced that world history teachers often do not have the range of content knowledge that the curriculum approaches. Dozono (2020) and Cairns (2020) additionally suggest that if teachers had learned content rooted in Western and settler colonial visions of the world during their own education, then they would likely reinforce these viewpoints in their teaching. Therefore, the fact that the participants in this study similarly had limited exposure to global content and the connections made between the United States and the rest of the world’s history was unordinary.

The four participants reflected shifting curriculum mandates in relation to world history. All four teachers were educated in the same midwestern state, and only half experienced any form of a world history course in high school. In spite of Evelyn and Thomas having taken a world history class during their own secondary education, their memory of learning about other



regions of the world was strikingly the same as Catherine and Trey's recollections. All four spoke of Western content in their history classes, when they remembered specific content at all. Catherine and Trey mentioned that they had not had world history classes but had learned some Western Civilization in high school which had explored largely European history. Evelyn could not remember any eras or content that she experienced in her own world history class. Thomas mentioned that,

Because even when I was in high school I struggled with the high school version of (history) for some classes, just because the amount of standards and everything ends up being a lot of information and a lot of memorizing, and not a lot of deep dives, and those (deep dives) were the things I remember, getting really into the muck a little bit (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

Thomas reflected that he remembered more content from the college classes he had taken on the Norman Invasion of Britain and the Industrial Revolution.

Thomas's sentiment seemed to echo in the other participants' perceptions as well. They stated that the history classes that they chose to take in college were more memorable to them. Evelyn spoke of two Russian Revolution courses that she found interesting, but that she also took a history of her state, a course on the Mexican Revolution, a couple of U.S. history courses and a world overview. Trey took a South African history course that he recalled being focused on the formation of the modern state and a class in French history around the Enlightenment. Catherine, a history major as an undergraduate who earned her teaching degree later, emphasized that the courses she took centered around European history: "I remember a lot of European history stuff.

I was really excited to teach European History because... between freshmen and sophomore year in college, I went to Europe for the second time” (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020). Catherine’s education and experiences, both secondary and post-secondary, emphasized Western history. While U.S. history is not the same as European history, both favor narratives of Western progress toward democratic structures and industrialization that aid the rest of the world (Blaut 2012). This was generally true for all four participants and notable in how they framed their world history instruction. Catherine recognized that she had not learned much beyond Europe early on and used this as motivation to seek out professional development in African and Asian history. The other participants likewise recognized that they had less content knowledge outside of the West--Europe and the United States. Still, they did not always recognize the ways that this shaped their views of history. Their own content experiences grounded them in Western perspectives, even when studying other regions. When Trey spoke of his South African history class, he remembered learning about the Boers and the British colonization as opposed to indigenous peoples that resided there. Even in thinking about South African history, he did so from a lens of Western influence. Trey recognized that he taught from the perspective of someone who was educated in the United States and teaching U.S. students. Trey, and the other participants, seemed to align U.S. history with European historical movements, even when seeking to criticize some of those histories as Thomas sought to do. These approaches emphasize how the pervasiveness of the participants’ own education, an education unsurprisingly rooted in U.S. storylines centering Western influence and domination of global interactions, shaped their roles as world history teachers.

While Thomas’s history education was still focused on Western content, the greater takeaway for him was the type of learning he did and ways he could use that experience to help

his students learn. Thomas said the two classes he mentioned above brought the content alive for him:

I remember looking at legal documents during Norman Invasion time. You can see the language developing how it was not a solid language, every document was spelled differently because it was all phonetic basically and based on the background every word was practically spelled a little differently, and describing what an ordeal was, like how they would try people. It was really specific if you could imagine a specific case. And, the same thing with the textile thing. You could imagine living there or getting down to the experience versus the big picture and dates and specifics (T.

McCrie, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

For Thomas, it was the experience of learning. He carried this into his world history classroom as well. Thomas wanted students to “deep dive” into events like the Rwandan Genocide, but he also added that he wanted those events or themes to allow students to make connections to their own lives. He often considered how the themes and events he was teaching could relate to the students’ lived experiences. As he taught students living in the United States, he connected world events to the modern U.S. issues of racism and immigration.

Catherine explained another way in which her lived experience shaped how she thought about teaching world history. In teaching the Cold War, Catherine mentioned that she wanted students to understand the context of the period from her perspective. She often explained to her students that she wrote a story about the threat of nuclear war when she was in elementary school that featured a “snow” storm of nuclear debris. She emphasized that this was to make students

aware that even as a child the threat of the Cold War was something she was aware of. “Maybe I emphasize it too much because it was something that was occurring because I was I guess in my formative years. As opposed to somebody who was born later. Unlike the students that we have now” (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020). By trying to make these events palpable for her students, Catherine emphasized her own experience, which like Trey’s viewpoint above, was a U.S.-based experience that highlights a certain picture of the Cold War. Catherine’s teaching and therefore her students’ access to historical perspectives is both aided and limited by her experience. In this case, Catherine presented the fear that permeated society during the Cold War, but also from a U.S. point of view that encapsulated only a part of the world’s experience. In so doing, Catherine added a U.S. and Western lens to her world history class. Catherine also referenced not just her lived experiences in her teaching but current events as well. During the interviews, she often contemplated how, for example, current immigration laws in the United States or the response to COVID, might relate to content we were discussing. The fluidity with which she connected ideas implied that she would do the same in class, possibly implicitly. This drew on her own and her students’ U.S.-rooted experiences and could serve to center their U.S.-based perspectives.

As previously noted, the educational experiences of the participants influenced how they framed world history instruction. None of the participants had strong world history learning opportunities during their own schooling, either secondary or postsecondary. They did, however, recall history education grounded in their U.S. experiences and Western Civilization generally. Because of this, the participants developed their ideas of world history through their U.S. lenses implicitly with limited exposure to other approaches.

### **Concerns about Teaching World History**

History teachers generally, and as anyone who has spent time in schools knows, all teachers, fret about the time constraints of their curriculum. History teachers often muse that their content grows everyday as more history is “made”. Most of the participants in this study lamented that every year they are expected to teach more content, either through shifts in standards or more emphasis on the modern era specifically. In world history courses, the overwhelming scope of the content intimidates teachers who may struggle with how to arrange content to be both inclusive of vast times and regions and narrow enough to provide depth (Harris, 2014; Harris, 2012; Harris & Bain, 2011).

These concerns are not without merit or frequency. They play into both the ways in which the participants make instructional decisions, but also how they explain their decisions. For example, the participants often seemed reticent at first to say they included the U.S. in their instruction of world history. Catherine and Trey instead repeated traditional barriers in teaching world history such as too much content and that the students have several years of U.S. history as compared to world history. These concerns are echoed throughout research on world history education (Harris, 2014; Harris, 2012; Harris & Bain, 2011) which underscores that the curriculum’s broad focus has presented difficulties of pacing and organizing content for teachers. Additionally, their responses captured how typical divisions of traditional academic history reinforce artificial boundaries in the study of history (Watt, 2012; Don, 2003; Bender 2000). The participants, particularly Trey and Catherine, expressed this by noting their intention of teaching the world with limited U.S. content because they saw these divisions reinforced by their own learning and curriculum.

All four participants mentioned initially and regularly throughout the interviews that not only did they assume that students gained a firm understanding of U.S. history in courses devoted to it, but also that they felt obligated to strive for greater coverage of neglected or underserved regions. Catherine, Trey and Thomas, all experienced world history teachers, pointed out that Africa, Latin America and Asia are vastly understudied given their roles in the world. Catherine specifically noted that Latin America and Australia were notoriously missing from world textbooks and standards. The implication of this statement is that if these regions were not even discussed, how could world history teachers justify adding more U.S. history, since her students were educated in U.S. schools that required several years of studying their own nation's history. Catherine highlighted a clear weakness in the scope of world history courses. This weakness is one that is reinforced by the standards and world history textbooks in the same way that they sparingly include the United States. Possibly in Catherine's case, she was also leveraging her knowledge of AP World curricula that largely leaves out the West in favor of other regions, a model that Catherine noted comfort within the first interview. Evelyn, a first-year teacher and therefore the newest educator of the group, mentioned that she included the U.S. "probably more than I should, but tried not to" (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, March 5, 2020). This self-admonishment showed that this first-year teacher had already been inculcated to believe that the U.S. and the world were meant to be separate subjects. The participants repeated these narratives that are often heard in pedagogical discussions about world history. They serve as a form of a cultural understanding that history teachers adopt as they struggle through their curricular choices. The element of culture in figured worlds, as demonstrated by these participants, is rooted in their past experiences studying history as well as their teaching of world history (Holland et al., 1998). As a novice teacher, Evelyn expressed that she was doing

something not quite right by including the United States as much as she was. The other teachers relied on staid divisions. They invoked, even while in some cases pushing against, the normative practices they had been trained to uphold (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). This training was not necessarily or likely ideas they were instructed on during their teacher preparation programs but rather ingrained. Barton and Levstik (2003) noted that social studies teachers tend to avoid controversy and discomfort. These participants refrained from openly incorporating U.S. history because they believed that in their roles as world history teachers that they were supposed to do so.

The participants' reticence to discuss the inclusion of the United States manifested itself during the initial interviews of the study. As the interviews continued, the participants expressed more ways that they considered the United States as part, even if peripheral, to world history instruction. For example, Thomas said he included the United States to draw on prior knowledge and make parallels for students, but not as a focal point for instruction. Thomas as well as Catherine and Trey noted that they might mention or draw on students' prior knowledge, but they did not "teach" that content. An example that these three participants specifically mentioned was the American Revolution. Thomas best exemplified how the participants leveraged previous history classes both to recall prior knowledge and avoid specific content:

... They cover so much of American Revolution in eighth grade,  
... I go on the assumption that the kids already have a good grasp  
on it. So, when it comes to Enlightenment, I probably focus on that  
much more, because I use it as a way to, without directly  
mentioning, at first, the American Revolution, all the different  
ideas that were coming up about that time. And then I think, and

I'm not kidding, I think I spent two seconds on the American Revolution, because I literally said, "It happened, let's move on. You guys know what happened" (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

Thomas both recognized a need to include the American Revolution in relation to Enlightenment ideas and assumed that the students already knew enough about the Revolution to synthesize information. In doing this, Thomas relied on his colleagues' teaching but privileged the American Revolution and left the Revolution as framed from a U.S. perspective.

Evelyn echoed Thomas's reasons for including the United States occasionally in her instruction, although she explained that she used the United States as a parallel whenever she felt it would hook her struggling students. In teaching the Industrial Revolution, Evelyn drew on eighth grade history classes that her students had taken. She began with an activity about the origins of the Industrial Revolution in Manchester, England, but then used U.S. examples of working conditions to raise her students' comfort. Similarly, Trey included a number of American inventions such as the cotton gin and the assembly line to build upon student knowledge. Catherine related historical content to the reasons that students' families may have immigrated to the United States. Their discussion of their instructional decision making, and their shared materials indicated that the United States did play a significant role in their framing and teaching of world history.

The participants' initial shying away from substantive inclusion of U.S. history seemed almost like a learned refrain they had internalized about the purpose of teaching world history; this was the year to instruct students about other societies. This refrain became secondary as they discussed not only the ways in which they included the United States, but also the reasons that



they would make this choice. Evelyn, who taught just one section of world history, ultimately reflected she didn't see how it could be avoided in the end, "I don't even know how you'd exclude the United States, but I try not to talk about it as much as possible" (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, May 12, 2020). Evelyn's sense of this as a new teacher drew on how world history had been shaped by other teachers, colleagues and in her own educational experience. In Evelyn's statement, there is tension between the communities that she traversed in her figured world. She believed that her students benefited from the centering of the United States, but her instruction was not solely based on this element of her community. Evelyn's decisions also reflected the actions of other social studies teachers. She knew from their choices and offered materials that she was to focus on other parts of the world in her teaching.

Because the United States had not been included much in the explicit curriculum as a student or in the one she was now teaching, Evelyn recognized that there was some perceived separation. As a U.S. history teacher, she saw how she could make parallels that students would understand. In some ways, her understanding of what students had learned and the accepted narrative of world history were at odds in her decision-making. She was trying to weigh out the value of connecting student knowledge while also preserving the ways in which broader narratives about U.S. history and world history as separate areas of study (Lemke, 2005).

Through their explanations of particular content, it became apparent that the United States did enter into all of the participants' classes regularly. Since the state's high school world history curriculum focuses on the modern eras, the United States was part, although often not specifically mentioned, of the historical periods. Trey said, as a result of this, that he brings in the United States where it applies. He suggested that this might not be too often or in too much depth. In his provided presentations and in later interviews he seemed to draw on the U.S.

regularly, even when other participants did not. He had an entire section of his presentation on imperialism that asked questions about the U.S. role in Latin America and the Pacific. Catherine and Thomas expressed that they saw their inclusion of the United States through current events discussions. This related-approach drew on U.S. influence in the modern world much like Trey, even if expressed differently. Again, while all four of the participants said that they tried to limit the U.S. content in their world history classes because that was what was expected of them; they actually spoke of the United States regularly in class, drawing on examples from U.S. history that ultimately not only accessed potential prior knowledge of students, but also framed world history through the lens of U.S. history.

### **The United States as an Exemplar**

Not just traditional considerations for world history classes entered into how the participants made instructional decisions. Both broadly-held views of the United States as exceptional and as an exemplar impacted how the participating teachers considered including the U.S. in their world history courses. The view that the United States is separate from and unlike other nations because of its uniquely centered ideals of equality and embracing diversity (Lipsett, 1997) could make the United States seem disconnected from studying other regions and nations of the world. Yet, this view that makes the United States seem both separate from and an exemplar for other nations can also impact the mentions of the United States that do occur. While the participants did not specifically state that they agreed with the idea of American exceptionalism, and in fact, sometimes did say that the United States was not acting as an example to be followed, this trope seemed to be present in their process for determining content. This almost lamenting of a loss of American exceptionalism has also been present in mainstream media discussions of recent political events in the United States as writers and politicians

confronted the type of example the United States has become (Tharoor, 2021; *The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2021)

The opportunity to include U.S. content and ideals was arguably part of the time periods we explored. In the second and third interviews of the study, participants discussed content from Era 6: An Age of Global Revolutions. In the second meeting, we framed the discussion around content and standards related to political revolutions of the era in addition to some economic movements of the time. For the third interview, participants shared resources and materials that they had used as part of teaching about the Industrial Revolution and Imperialism, also considered to be part of Era 6. The list of political revolutions from the standards included the American Revolution, but neither the Industrial Revolution nor Imperialism standards explicitly included U.S. content. In both of these interviews, I planned and asked about the United States and the extent to which the participants felt that the nation had a place within this world history content. That said, all four of the participants brought up the United States through the Industrial Revolution and/or Imperialism resources and approaches they discussed. Trey explained he knew he was influenced by being a U.S.-born teacher teaching in a U.S. school and that it would likely surface in his approach. As U.S.-educated teachers, their own learning influenced their understanding of the content and how nuanced their own approaches might be (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988).

As part of the second interview, I asked participants to rank/prioritize a list of events mentioned in Era 6 standards. One of those events was the American Revolution. Each of the participants downplayed the American Revolution, stating that they preferred to focus on the French Revolution and possibly the Haitian Revolution. During the conversations, each participant suggested, as Thomas did above about the Enlightenment, that the American

Revolution was only an event to contrast with the French and Haitian Revolutions. The American Revolution is often viewed as less extreme than the French and Haitian, referring to the mass violence that occurred during them. Trey's explanation of how he included the American Revolution did not refer to the violence but rather the chronology of events that shows patterns:

If the French Revolution happened first, then I would be teaching the French Revolution as the event that sparked this global movement of changing people's views, changing on what the role of government is in their lives and what they expect from it and so on. The American Revolution happens first, so we start with it. ... What I'm trying to say is it is part of a pattern in world history. I teach it not because I'm an American and I really, really want to talk about that, I teach it because it's part of this global pattern of world revolutions. That's the focus. So, the Enlightenment and then the American Revolution and then Napoleon comes into it... (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 10, 2020).

Trey's explanation of his decision making, and inclusion of the American Revolution showed his concerns for timing and what might be described as a pragmatic approach to what he called a massive unit. The explanation downplayed how Trey addressed the American Revolution while simultaneously assigning the event special significance. While world history teachers may see this approach as sidestepping U.S. content, the framing of the event also implied a privileged position. Some argue that the Haitian Revolution deserves far more attention and value in curriculum than the event receives (Pontius-Vandenberg, J., 2020), but the French Revolution

and the American Revolution are Western (Blaut, 2012). Trey's privileging of the American Revolution may reinforce the United States as exemplary from its very beginnings, a frame that implicitly shapes student understanding (Lakoff, 2004).

Trey taught the American Revolution because it fit into his curriculum. In this case, the American Revolution was specifically mentioned in the standards, but the participants also included U.S. content when it was not. According to the participants, sometimes the U.S. seemed a natural connection. Evelyn noted that she kept referencing the U.S. because it was familiar and because students would recognize the impact of the U.S. on the Industrial Revolution. She said that she naturally drew on U.S. examples; it was not planned. This speaks to the strength of the narratives that Evelyn used; the U.S.'s role as a global innovator may help students make connections, but also affirms a positive association with industrialization and the United States. (Lemke, 2005). To an extent this may be a strong regional identity of innovation, but Evelyn was not alone in thinking about larger narratives about the United States as an exemplar or important participant in world events. Trey also brought the United States into a unit about the Industrial Revolution. He commented on the many innovations that came from the United States and then noted, "That is not being uber patriotic or whatever, it's just the facts" (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 15, 2020). Certainly, the role that the United States played in the Industrial Revolution is significant, but other nations, both in capacity of colonizers and the colonized, also have tremendous roles in the Industrial Revolution--and were directly mentioned in the state standards. The emphasizing of the United States potentially reinforces the nation as exceptional. Highlighting the U.S. role against or in place of the British, Germans, French and Belgians in a world history class may help tap into prior knowledge but may hinder the understanding of the role of other industrialized nations.

Thomas and Catherine, although they teach in different districts, approached the United States in the Industrial Revolution through a similar activity. Both mentioned that they don't attempt to teach information about the United States during the Industrial Revolution, but it did appear in a handout that they both used. In the activity in which students modeled different concepts of the Industrial Revolution as living statues and in both cases the example they used to show the students how to do the activity was from U.S. history. While both expressed that this used prior knowledge and did not carry through to the rest of the activity, it also reinforced the role of the United States in the Industrial Revolution. Arguably, it even elevates the status of the United States through its prominence as the example the teacher offered the class. While Thomas suggested that giving an example from the United States helps students to "understand that this isn't just about the U.S., it's about how societies react to this type of conflict" (T. McCrie, personal interview, April 22, 2020). (In this case the conflict was how individuals are treated as part of the Industrial Revolution.) Yet, as an example, this usage centered the United States in unintended ways. It follows that the ways in which the participants thought about including the United States had practical considerations that were understandable and commendable; accessing prior knowledge and relating another region or country's history to something students are familiar with seems logical. Yet, the way in which the teachers framed this inclusion undermined what the teachers had themselves suggested that they wanted to do. They stated that their goal was to focus on other regions of the world. They supported their views with the assertion that the history education that their students received was grounded in their home culture and narratives. These narratives are not just implicit in the culture of world history teaching and the U.S. culture broadly, but also the hierarchy of power that the teachers are part (Russ, Sherin & Sherin, 2016).

Teachers could push at these systems, and in some cases the participants did, yet they were influenced by these larger values.

### **Teachers Using the Present to Inform Curricular Choices**

A final element that influenced the way in which teacher participants considered including the United States in their world history courses was a type of backwards design. Often in education, backwards design conjures images of unit planning with summative assessment in mind. In this case, however, I mean that the participants made decisions about what and how to cover the past based on their perceptions of the present. While this reflected another way of shaping historical trends for students, it also plays into the perception of U.S. power in the second half of the twentieth century. This act of curricular gatekeeping potentially centers the United States' influence prematurely. The participants may or may not have recognized their role as gatekeepers, but more significantly do not have appeared to consider the effects of such choices (Thornton, 2005).

While the participants did not use the term “gatekeeper”, they did discuss framing their material in certain ways. The teachers reflected that they choose to include the United States increasingly as their content grew more recent. Trey specifically mentioned that there is a point in which “U.S. history becomes world history” (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020). Trey explained this as indisputable. Certainly, the U.S. played an increased global role in much of the twentieth century. In acknowledgement of this role, Trey said he included the United States more in what he taught as he saw fit which suggested that Trey saw himself as gatekeeping and choosing what students would learn about (Thornton, 1991). He taught World War II with some emphasis on the increasing role of the United States in diplomatic and military actions. Even in considering industrialization and Imperialism, Trey showed an increasing global

role by the United States. His presentation that chronicled Imperialism included slides on the U.S. occupation of Hawaii and the Philippines (through the Spanish-American War). Trey did not only point out positive actions as he had with the Industrial Revolution but centered the annexation of Hawaii and control of the Philippines as an expression of U.S. power. This framing of U.S. power played into broader cultural ideas about the U.S.'s status as a world power in the twentieth century. It is not that these events are not historical happenings or significant, but that Trey's presentation of them is rooted in a U.S. perception of the nation's power. In his role as world history teacher and gatekeeper, Trey handpicked not only content but perspective. He discussed these actions in terms of U.S. power and position, and the actions show not just U.S. power but how this world history teacher layered world events and the accumulation of prestige by his native nation. From a more global perspective, the expansion of U.S. power is important, but so too are the other involved peoples, such as the native populations of Hawaii or the Philippines who would likely have viewed these events differently.

Tying historical events to current events was another way in which the participants used the present to inform the past. Catherine and Thomas discussed current events as a way for students to have knowledge of present-day events while studying history. Catherine implied she made a point of drawing parallels to current events in her world history courses, and this often drew on national events that the students raised. Catherine cited the example of immigration. The recent imposing of immigration restrictions in the United States had led to conversations about why people immigrate now and the push-pull factors that had led others to in the past. She asked students to think about their own families and what had led them to move to the United States. (She pointed out that most of her students were of European descent and were likely not recent immigrants themselves) In doing so, Catherine did not change her approach to historical events



directly, but rather used current events topics to raise particular points about the past including commonalities across cultures: “We're all globally connected, even as much as we want to be insular, we're definitely not. I teach, I think, with the end in mind so that kids have an idea that there's people outside of this country that are just like you and me” (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020). Catherine’s intention in drawing on modern events was one that aligns with the idea of an interconnected global society. She emphasized a certain American immigration story to ask students to think about the present country’s actions. Her intention was to have students see connections and push against divisions between people and places over time. Still, her initial approach of connecting historical immigration to the present day was limited by her community of students as well as the stereotypical American immigration with which they were familiar.

Both Catherine and Thomas used the United States as it currently or recently acted in the world to decide how to bring out ideas and topics from the past. Thomas, whose course was thematically arranged, drew on injustices or inequalities in the present United States to raise concerns about historical events elsewhere. He did so in hopes of piquing student interest but also creating relevance. If he was addressing the hierarchies of Ancient Greek or Ottoman societies then he would ask students to compare those inequalities to those they were experiencing. Thomas was interested in having students critique their own experience and relate them to how others had resisted power in the past. For Thomas, the relevance of history lay in its applicability to the present lives of his students; he saw the present or recent present as not just a way to learn from historical events but as a window into them.

In their approaches, these three participants used current circumstances to shape their teaching of the past in significant ways. They also chose to do this through their own conceptions

of what students should know at the end of their world history courses and specifically how the United States was at the forefront of those conversations, either positively or negatively. These framings were likely not coincidental but rather rose out of the cultural narratives of the United States that they have.

## **Discussion**

This chapter explored how teachers made decisions about including the United States in their world history courses. To some extent, almost all teachers make decisions about what to teach based on their curriculum, students, and time constraints. Ryan Knowles (2018) and Knowles and Antonio Castro (2018) indicated that an educator's beliefs and philosophy influenced their instructional strategies. While the participants in this study discussed criteria they used, their reasoning as related to U.S.-related content in world history had insightful connections to broad narratives, either regarding the United States' role in the world or perceived parameters of world history instruction. These narratives help to raise questions about how culture, teacher identities and roles shape historical understandings for students.

The factors that these teachers discussed portrayed different layers of cultural influence in relation to their inclusion of U.S. content. Initially in the interviews, each participant downplayed the amount they drew on the United States in their world history classes. They repeated a series of standard refrains: the U.S. has its own courses; this is the one time that students will learn about the rest of the world; and I might include it if I had more time. George Lakoff (2004) noted that individuals (and groups) create connotations by framing their discourses in certain ways. While Lakoff (2004) wrote about these in terms of political messages, the participants seemed to respond with the expectation of excluding the United States from world history instruction. This is not an element of deeply-rooted American culture, yet this is a representative rationale of the

divisions in the study of history that both higher education and secondary education have embraced (Bender, 2006; Guarneri & Davis, 2008; Guarneri, 2007). Social studies teachers, and in this case world history teachers, have learned to embrace these artificial separations for the ease of choosing and maybe more importantly, explaining content. With this in mind, the participants expressed the traditional boundaries of their course; they voiced the expected responses they thought they should give in their role as world history teachers (Holland & Lave, 2009). This narrative is professional, almost a code among history teachers to rein in their subject matter. This speaks to the cultural plotlines that are embedded in teaching this content area. According to Holland et al. (1998) these teachers can push against these expected narratives, and the participants do so in certain ways and to some extent. Still, they recognize the traditional ideas to which they feel beholden.

In fact, these participants had learned history this way. The divisions in historical content were not just in the textbooks and curricular guides they used, but rather those reinforced their own social studies education and history courses. The influence of the participants' own educational experiences asks how their role as world history learners affects their practices as teachers. It is likely that their previous figured worlds as learners formed a foundation for their views and actions as teachers. Figured worlds are an expression not just of current practices, but also rather "history-in-person" which reflects their individual pasts (Urrieta, 2007b).

Over the course of the interviews, however, cracks in this veneer began to surface. All of the participants explained ways in which they included the United States, either as prior knowledge, a point of comparison, an exemplar or simply exceptional. There are many explanations for the dissonance between the teacher's original statements and their subsequent reflections. The separation between the world and the U.S. content was part of their own social

studies education is one account--and therefore normalized. Thus, the participants were replicating assumed structures about learning history. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on the decisions they made and the roles they assumed in doing so. Through situated responses to lessons they taught and materials they had used, the participants reflected on their rationales and answered in ways that expressed not just the roles that they assumed, but also their agency to act and influence their spaces (Bartlett & Holland, 2002). The participants described their actions through specific contexts that highlighted their improvisations with content; these descriptions revealed how they as individuals enacted their roles (Urrieta, 2007b; Holland et al, 1998). The participants sought to align their practices and roles with what they believed was expected of them. Their general descriptions of their world history instruction reflected their sense of department or school culture. In school settings where there was an emphasis on standards or testing, the participants initially reflected this in their descriptions. It was only as the participants had additional opportunities and comfort to discuss their decision making that they mentioned ways in which they deviated from their initially-voiced plotlines. The implication of these shifts is that teachers given space to reflect on their practice can consider the ways their practice is both separate from perceived cultural or school expectations and incongruent from their initial perceptions of their own actions. Moreover, they were able to explore the ways in which they have employed cognitive dissonance in their decision making (Tavris & Aronson, 2007).

This recognition of this difference between perceived and actual practice was not limited to adhering to content divisions, although the national historical narratives proved more ingrained. Although their stated intention was to explore places other than the United States, the teachers returned to a national lens. The participants framed the world through the United States in one way or another. While all of the participants acknowledged that they were concerned that

coverage of the United States might interfere in the limited exposure that students have to world history, they also all could not avoid drawing on U.S. history in their teaching. They saw this in terms of accessing prior knowledge, but their reasoning also suggested mainstream portrayals of the nation as an exemplar or an exception. The participants discussed prior knowledge as a window for students to make sense of historical events outside the U.S., but that window offered a view with only one perspective. For example, by framing the earlier events in world history in the context of the recent prestige of the United States, teachers potentially focused their students' view of world history from a national perspective. As the teachers found routines that worked with their students, they reinforced cultural narratives with which the students were probably familiar (Holland et. al, 1998). These narratives and storylines became important influences in the participants' figured world as they shape their decisions and identities as world history teachers and their students as learners.

One might argue that this shaping of history for student understanding was simply nuanced. Nuanced instruction usually, as is the case in Suzanne Wilson and Samuel Wineburg's (1988) study, implies that the educators make connections to larger themes or historical trends. The ability to do this is no small feat nor universal as Wilson and Wineburg's (1988) study suggested. World history teachers have a unique burden to do this across significant time periods and locations. Yet, attention should be paid to the perspective embedded in that subtle analysis and sensemaking. A United States perspective aligns with a Western view of society. Blaut (2012) and Willinsky (1989) might contend that even centering the Western nations during industrialization merely continues the narrative that the West, and the U.S. as representative of that, is all that matters. In spite of being a nation that draws immigrants from all over the world and increasingly non-European (Banks, 2012), the U.S. historical narrative, and specifically

world history, privileges the West. The reach of these narratives dominated even the good intentions of these educators, showing the power of these carried narratives (Urrieta, 2007b). These narratives have been challenged only in certain circles of postcolonial thought, and shapes history and culture of all regions from a perspective not shared by the majority of the world (Prakash, 1994; Cooper, 1994). This point of view, especially when finely framed and executed, can cement narratives in teacher identity let alone students. The power from these national portrayals shape the worlds these teachers negotiate; they become cultural boundaries so ingrained that they are barely noted or jostled in practice. These then serve as formed and reformed boundaries in one's figured world.

Throughout this chapter, I explored how the participants envisioned world history broadly as well as the place of the United States in their teaching. As world history teachers, the participants defined their roles and identities through their intention to broaden student views of the globe. All four participants framed their positions as world history educators through their perceptions of what the curriculum was and the purpose of teaching it. Each of the educators saw teaching world history as a unique space to help students think beyond the United States and still were deeply tied to their national understandings. In the next chapter, I will explore how the participants' views and roles were influenced by the communities that they were part of, the resources they had access to, and the State standards that guided them.

## CHAPTER 6

### COMMUNITY AND RESOURCES SHAPE DECISION MAKING

In this chapter, I seek to understand how teachers make their instructional decisions in their world history courses. In some ways the previous chapter highlights the factors that teachers consider in terms of including the United States as well as some of their broader views about teaching world history, but not the more tangible influences of their school communities and resources. This chapter, however, explores how colleagues, students, and resources are determining factors. These are the factors that the participants stressed as part of their decision-making process for daily and unit lessons. The teachers spoke of the influence of their communities on their world history instruction. These included their colleagues, students and resources. Each participant defined these communities differently and in ways that reflect their sense of the power structures in which they operate and the freedom they have within those structures. The participants discussed the ways in which they drew on different resources and members of their communities as they framed world history lessons. These comments showed not just the power of these influences individually and collectively, but also where these teachers saw their own agency to teach what they value, both generally and more specifically related to the United States in world history. Their perceived communities reflected a connection that extended beyond classroom proximity, shared content and standards or a scheduled class period. These communities shared deeper common ideas in relation to national ideals and values (Holland et. al., 1988; Anderson, 1991).

Over the course of this chapter, I consider the significance that these teachers ascribe to the various people of their communities and how the resources they have, and use reflect community structures. Whether they elaborated on teaching partnerships or the impact of their

student populations on curricular decisions they make, the participants spoke of stakeholders in those processes. Initially, I explore the role their world history students played for the participants. Although these teachers varied in the strategies and resources they chose to incorporate, they made these based on their assessment of their students' needs and learning styles as well as the extent to which they wanted to promote critical thinking in their students. Beyond students, the participants drew on the experience and views of their colleagues through longstanding partnerships, and in others, commonly agreed upon pacing guides with groups of other teachers. The impact of both of these groups has broad implications for curricular choices and more specifically to the inclusion of the United States in their classes. People within the school building were not the only factors influencing the teachers' decisions. With this in mind, I consider the ways in which the resources that the teachers shared acted as artifacts to reinforce expectations and factor into the role and identities that these teachers enact. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared, discussed or were prompted by a variety of resources including textbooks, activities and presentations. An additional resource, the State world history standards also played a role in these conversations. I used the standards to bound the interviews, and the participants reflected on the extent to which they saw the standards as prescriptive in their inclusion of the United States.

### **The Role of Colleagues in Shaping Instructional Decisions**

Teaching is both a solitary and sociable profession. Educators share ideas and experiences with one another, but often instruct students individually. Yet, even without co-teaching, colleagues can impact the teaching of others. In this study, the participants discussed both the ways in which they made decisions about lessons as individuals and as part of a group in relation to their world history courses. For all four participants, their perceptions regarding the



views and pacing of colleagues influenced the way they conducted their own world history classrooms. These impacts were broader than how the United States was incorporated into their world history instruction, but still shaped this instructional decision as well.

Two of the participants spoke of the role a specific teaching partner played in their instructional decision making. Catherine and Thomas had developed these partnerships during a student teaching placement. In Catherine's case, she was the mentor teacher. For Thomas, he was the student teacher who eventually was hired into the department in which he had been a pre-service teacher. The beginning of these partnerships coincided with the State's requirement to take world history in high school. As a result, both Catherine and Thomas learned to teach world history with their former student teacher and mentor, respectively. Thomas spoke of this experience:

I remember it was new for William too or the text was new, and we were kind of designing it as we went a little bit, and a lot of it was just figuring out what that is like to create as you go, and there are times when the way he teaches or the engagement piece is more important than the content (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

Thomas's memories of this initial world history partnership as well this continued pairing at Woodbridge High School have given him confidence to teach thematically and to include the United States in his course as a way to draw in his students. Thomas and William shared a belief in engagement over content and developed their world history courses to relate to their students' lives. In Thomas's case, this has meant tying in issues like Black Lives Matter or systemic racism. Notably, Thomas often spoke of this in terms of both engagement and development of

critical thinking. These terms are by no means synonymous, yet Thomas seemed to hope that engagement and interest in content would fuel critical analysis of contemporary society.'

Both Thomas and Catherine spoke about how they felt the power differential that once existed had faded into one of equal footing and complimentary skills. In Catherine's case, she worked consistently with her planning partner, Mary, since beginning to teach world history. They had now taught the course for more than a decade together, bouncing ideas and activities off of each other. Catherine emphasized the balance of strengths that working with Mary brought:

I think the history [of working together] is there, right? So, we've got a pretty good understanding of both of our different teaching styles and like things that she wants to do versus things that I want to do. But then also, I think I've done more outside training, like I did [professional development on East Asia], I've done the [workshop] on African studies too. So, I can bring that to the table and bring in the resources that will help further our non-European and non-American history along (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020).

Through this collaboration, Catherine felt that the pair leveraged their strengths to offer students a more complete world history course with less Western content. Catherine said she contributed to the partnership by pushing both Mary and her to think beyond the West, including the United States. The pair relied on each other to develop specific lessons, assessments, resources and overall pacing of the course. With a course with as much breadth as this curriculum requires, Catherine and Mary's partnership offered both teachers an opportunity to borrow strategies and

content ideas from one another to create a more global course. Catherine sensed that her role as a world history teacher and colleagues was to broaden the content beyond the United States. This mutual effort to shift content focus toward Asia and Africa emphasized Catherine's awareness of this potential pitfalls of teaching too much about the West. She mentioned her concern about balance when imagining her Age of Revolutions unit:

We start with the Enlightenment as a branch out of the scientific revolutions affecting the sixteenth century. But again, it's interesting because even this year, I was like, "Well, what are they doing in Africa? I mean, how does this Enlightenment idea impact there? And why aren't these ideas coming out of China?" It's like 1,000 years ahead of other societies. But I digress. So, this is all very European focused (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 14, 2020).

Catherine saw her role as world history teacher and colleague as a place to think about more regions and places in the world than just the West. The opportunity to share content knowledge was critical to Catherine. Her commitment to professional development and desire to learn additional content guided this view. As a result, she felt qualified to nudge Mary and others in this area.

Thomas attributed his part of his approach to teaching world history to working with his former mentor teacher, William. Thomas did not view William as having more authority to decide what and how the two approached world history because he had taught elsewhere after student teaching that he had some separation from being a student teacher. This separation made Thomas feel equal in status and power to William who had taught significantly longer than

Thomas. This, and their comfort working together, lessened what could be a power differential between the two (Holland et al., 1998). He explained that he was happy “to have somebody to bounce ideas off of; it can get pretty lonely sometimes” (T. McCririe, personal interview, May 8, 2020). Thomas also noted that he and William had similar approaches to teaching; they both emphasized connectability to students’ lives and a thematic approach. During the 2019-2020 school year, Thomas and William chose to teach world history through an entirely thematic approach. Thomas believed that this was a better way to think about world history for his students and himself:

When a thematic similarity comes up with something that happened let's say a few hundred years earlier I would then have to reteach the thing I already taught so that they can make the connections to this new thing, and I'm wasting time now. I feel like it's much more convenient to just go with the theme all at once, and then when I refer back to those same events I don't have to just refer to one instance of imperialism, I can just refer to imperialism (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020).

Thomas’s reasoning related to both pacing and connections that he could help students to make. William concurred and they sketched out the themes that made the most sense to them. They emphasized human organization (of societies), ideology, conflict and revolution, subjugation and class struggle, and globalism. The pair helped each other to think through the themes and the content that corresponded with each theme. They brainstormed guest speakers and projects that would help students to learn across eras and places. For Thomas, William was a receptive colleague who willingly explored different approaches to teaching world history.

Thomas also suggested that his sense of agency to challenge the chronological path to teaching world history was affirmed not only by William, but also by the administration of his school. The school in which he taught, Woodbridge High School, was incredibly supportive of teachers trying new approaches to courses or programs that educators thought would benefit students. Thomas saw this another way in Woodbridge High School, which had a more fluid hierarchy. He felt empowered to make decisions using his professional judgment. Thomas noted, “Here I feel like, especially with the administration we have, you can try whatever you want as long as it's what's best for kids” (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). An example of this in his class included the study of subjugation of individuals whether that was the caste system in India or slavery in the Americas. Thomas believed connecting these movements across time and space helped his students to recognize injustice in their own lives and world.

In addition to the influences of his colleagues at school, Thomas was also married to a social studies teacher in another district. He explained that his partner, Melanie taught world history in a district that he characterized as different than his -- a district more focused on state test scores. Melanie’s structure and more traditional way of teaching the course shaped his choices as well. He would borrow either whole activities or parts of them. When Thomas struggled on how to approach a topic, he would ask Melanie first. Melanie was more detail-focused in terms of content, but her questions and approach often inspired Thomas’s ideas: “I don’t do things the way she does, but her questions make me think about what is important” (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Thomas was surrounded by world history conversation in and out of the classroom. He leveraged these conversations in his teaching. Even though Thomas had a clear vision for his world history classes, his decision making was deeply influenced by others in how he conceptualized lessons and felt empowered to enact them. These

actions seem contrary to the work of Chauncey Monte-Sano and Christopher Budano (2013) or S.G. Grant (2003) who found teachers with similar preparation or state assessments to make different instructional decisions. Possibly Thomas and William had what the teachers in those studies did not, which was the same administration and ability to plan together. While Thomas was guided by his own learning and view of world history, the community outside of his classroom helped to shape his decisions and perceptions of agency in guiding his classes.

Trey was also surrounded by collegial educators, although he was less influenced by individual teachers than Thomas or Catherine. The social studies department in which he taught spent a great deal of time together, meeting before each school day and between classes. “Here at White Cedar, a lot of the people I work with, we’ve worked together for 15 to 20 years, we’re all roughly the same age. And the newer hires are awesome, and we share. We’re actually friends” (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Trey would keep up with his fellow world history teachers by asking during the morning get-togethers in person or through a group text later in the day where in the content his colleague was. Trey felt that this helped him to stay on track and make tough decisions about what to teach and skip in world history content. He wanted to stay at least on pace with others if not a bit ahead. Trey said, “It’s always tough choices” (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020) on what to include, but he would spend less time on the American or French Revolutions if it meant he would maintain the same or a faster pace than his colleagues. While Trey discussed that he knew he and his colleagues had the freedom to teach what they wanted, including any “passion projects” as he called them, he preferred to stick to a schedule (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). For him, his colleagues affirmed what he considered to be his ability to complete the curriculum.

Trey viewed his position as the teacher who taught both world and U.S. history as valuable to the department. Because he had a foot in both courses, Trey tried to alleviate the stress of the broad curriculum that had to be taught in world. For example, he knew that they studied the Cold War extensively in the U.S. history class. With this in mind, he encouraged the world history teachers to limit their coverage of the Cold War. His position as a teacher of both subjects not only shaped the access to content for his students (Thornton, 2005), but also potentially framed his colleagues' thoughts about the Era. World history curriculum incorporates not just the U.S. actions in the Cold War, but those of non-aligned nations, particularly those in Africa and Latin America. While Trey's intent was to ease the strain of content, he also was asserting his own perspective in his classroom and those of others. Additionally, he leveraged his expertise as the only educator who taught both classes at this school. He felt that role established him as an expert; this expertise offered him status and power that gave him assurance in his world history teacher identity.

As a novice teacher, Evelyn was new to her curriculum, her colleagues and her school. Unlike Trey, Catherine, and Thomas, Evelyn did not have previous experience in the district, nor had she taught high school world history during her student teaching. Evelyn described all of her colleagues as helpful in sharing resources, but she also differentiated between the impact that her world history colleagues had on her day-to-day decisions and that of her U.S. history counterparts. Evelyn's U.S. history peers operated as a unit. While they did not do everything the same, they used a lot of common resources, activities and pacing. She distinguished them from her fellow world teachers in many ways, notably pacing and proximity. The U.S. history teachers all had classrooms near each other. The world history colleagues were in the eighth and ninth grade building that was nearby. Evelyn received the same kinds of resources from the world

history teachers that she did from her U.S. colleagues, but Evelyn only felt compelled to use the common assessment faithfully. She even stopped using that once her school closed due to COVID-19, and she was told that the students did not need to pass the remainder of it. The removal of her colleagues' expectations for Evelyn represented the removal of state standards and assessment expectations; she felt empowered to teach as she saw fit in spite of the fact that neither the standards nor her colleagues were as prescriptive as she had considered them (Passe & Fitchett, 2013). One could easily argue that Evelyn's experience with colleagues was about location, and likely it was, but this impacted how she enacted her world history curriculum.

Evelyn used some of the offered resources, but she felt free to change either the activities or the speed at which she moved. This sense of agency was due not just to the physical separation of her classroom from her colleagues. It was also a product of her class being remedial. Evelyn explained that these resources had not worked the previous year with her students. She felt responsible to find a different path to reaching them. She added games and shorter readings to which her students responded. For example, Evelyn introduced the Industrial Revolution with an activity called the Urban Game in which the students captured the impact of industrialization through drawing prompts about an English town over time. Because of positive responses to her additions, Evelyn was increasingly willing to shift her world history class away from her colleagues' strategies while adhering to the general topics.

Ultimately, the teachers in the study talked about what they gave and what they received from these partnerships in transactional ways. This highlighted the ways in which they engaged with teaching world history and even including the United States in that course. For them, their relationships with colleagues were important to both the content they taught and the strategies that they used. In Evelyn's case, her world history classes gave her a space to make choices



more freely--and in her case, as will be discussed later this meant including more U.S.-related content. For Catherine and Thomas, their teaching partners balanced their efforts. positioned himself as a gatekeeper in his community, someone who helped to direct into which courses content belonged. The participants saw these as logistical conversations in large part. With the exception of Catherine's role of including non-Western content and Thomas's thematic choices, the participants seemed more interested in day-to-day activities than broader content issues in their world history courses.

### **Active vs. Passive: Student Impacts on Decision Making**

Students are directly impacted by the instructional decisions that teachers make. This seems like an obvious statement, but the less clear elements are the ways in which students are thought about in those decisions. Students were part of the communities that the participants operated in and designed world history instruction for. In some cases, the student interests and experiences guided the instructional choices. Students might have localized interests that would draw more United States content into the teachers' decisions. While in other classrooms, the participants selected activities and content based on their impressions of students needs and access. This idea connected back to their purpose of widening student perspectives on the world in which they lived. Although the teachers are ultimately deciding how to include content in their classroom, their perceptions of incorporating students were vital to their determinations. Notably, the participants did not typically hold only one of these views, but rather their enactments emphasized one over the other.

Thomas and Evelyn showed an attentiveness to their students' experiences, even in how they thought about centering world history. Thomas commented consistently in the interviews that he wanted content to relate to or enable students to challenge their own understandings of

the society in which they live. He was concerned by the inequalities that the students in his classrooms faced as many represented racial, ethnic or linguistic minorities. Thomas saw this as an important responsibility to choose relevant themes for his students; he wanted to prepare them not just to acknowledge ways that society was unequal but how they could push against those inequities to better their own lives in the future. In teaching the Rwandan Genocide, Thomas and William took their classes to a local university to view a movie and talk to the director about the event. Thomas felt that the impact on his students was significant: “It's huge what they were able to do there, and for the most part I think they know even that it's not something that they're going to be tested on, and yet they're in. They're having deep conversations about this for the sake of the conversation, and that is valuable and that's awesome to see” (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). The student engagement in human rights and equality issues was relatable to his students’ lives. Because he saw the content and experience as transformative, he focused on issues and themes to structure his course. This was specific to his world history content and not how he taught U.S. history.

He centered his students’ backgrounds in how he enacted curricular choices as Harris and Girard (2014) indicated many teachers do. Thomas felt that students could learn how events in world history were similar to events in their own lives. When he discussed imperialism, Thomas focused his students on the experiences of the oppressed. He wanted his students to draw parallels to their own lives in the United States now. By making these connections, Thomas and his students drew on issues in their own school and broader community. As individuals living in the United States, it was inevitable that they drew on social movements in the United States such as Black Lives Matter or issues of immigration. The implication of Thomas’s motivation was

that his teaching decisions depended on where he taught and how the history of the United States impacted those communities--even when teaching world history.

Evelyn similarly molded her instruction on student interest and prior knowledge. Evelyn had a challenging course to teach in her first year as students had already had a negative experience with the course and content. As a result, she wanted to make certain that she was responsive to the learning needs and wants of her students. She tailored her instruction to topics students wanted to learn about, resources with which they would engage and connections to prior knowledge they had. The students in Evelyn's world history class had much more say in what and how they learned than her U.S. history students. "I think with world (history class) it's the students and my relationship, because I think, well, I know the good relationships that I have in class, they can do something....So I think that's why I asked them more often. That's what I think I base a lot of this stuff on in world, is their relationship" (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Evelyn found that this relationship meant simplifying resources, but also tying content to what students know, which was often some aspect of U.S. history. She said that U.S. historical events were what the students and she knew best, and as the year went on, she found herself drawing on U.S. history to help students engage with world history. During her Industrial Revolution unit, she infused her content with examples about the automotive industry and inventions like the Cotton Gin that had been important in the Southern slave economy. Although Evelyn had resources and engaged with her colleagues who taught world history through these resources, much of her decision making increasingly grew out of her relationship with her students and what they could most easily draw upon. She was not as critical of the United States in how she drew national events into her world history classes but rather seeking ways for the students to feel that they already had some content knowledge for her course; an additional goal

was to build on successes with her struggling students. Engagement was key, but also the ability to make relevant connections to her students which often included U.S. events like how industrialization developed in her State or the U.S. actions in the Cold War helped them to feel like they could succeed in the class.

Catherine and Trey also valued student thoughts and interaction as part of their classroom communities, but they relied upon their own extensive teaching experiences in world history to make decisions for their students. Catherine and Trey both discussed students as part of a wider vantage point. For Catherine, her focus was largely on the process of learning beyond her world history course. Trey, on the other hand, wanted to be pragmatic, based on his view of how students digest the information and content that he needed to teach. In both cases, Catherine and Trey made decisions for their students that they believed were in the best interest of their students, much like Evelyn and Thomas, but they did so with confidence based on their years of teaching experience generally and specifically in world history.

Catherine's choices came from both the expectations she has for students after they leave her class. In many ways, Catherine believed that students should leave her class with the skills to be lifelong learners. She pointed out multiple times that her world history course was the last history class that her students were required to take, in high school or possibly ever. She wanted them to have a strong sense of historical knowledge but possibly even more than that she wanted them to know how to find information. She explained this is as part of her own sense of curiosity, "I try to demonstrate to kids that you are never done learning" (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020). With this philosophy in mind, Catherine engaged students through current events or connecting historical information to what she expected student experiences to be. For example, she emphasized immigration push-pull factors to have students

consider global migration patterns, current immigration issues in the United States and the reasons her students' families immigrated to the United States. Catherine wanted students to have personal understandings of the historical content. The paths to making those associations were based on her years of teaching and knowledge of the student population rather than the interests of the students in the room. She could do this in part because the demographics of her district had not changed and remained predominantly of European descent. The community that she operated from could serve to limit her scope of the world and reinforce western perspectives in her teaching (Blaut, 2012). This decision to connect global immigration in the nineteenth century to her predominantly U.S-born, white students implicitly drew on the U.S. immigration boom during that time that brought many settlers to the area in which she taught. Her intention was to engage her students, but she also limited the scope of the immigration taking place in and from other areas of the world to focus on one path to U.S. immigration from Europe.

Trey's years of teaching experience pushed him to teach his students in a different way than Catherine. Trey felt that his students had changed over time and were less likely to sustain interest in his lectures. He missed engaging students with stories he had learned about historical events and personalities but worked to offer his students the same level of information without lecturing. This was true of both his world and U.S. history courses, and extensively shaped his instructional choices. Trey felt that the students he taught now learned better from presentations that could be used as part of direct instruction or could be self-paced. Trey sought to tap into what he saw as students' attachment to technology: "It's just a lot more visual and a lot more smaller detail. I guess I'm a visual learner, so I have always thought that that stuff makes it more interesting, brings it alive" (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 10, 2020). Trey believed that he was centering students' ways of learning and engaging through these presentations. He

prioritized his strategy over the content choices in his world history classes. He saw this approach as a way to have students engage with significant amounts of content as elaborated upon in the resource section of this section. For him, the strategy was a significant response to student learning. As noted, these presentations are how Trey plans all of his classes, world and United States. Although this approach was not unique to Trey's world history instruction, the choice portrayed that he viewed his instructional choices as a vehicle to impart knowledge but less about actively conversing with his students about its implications. As noted previously, Trey's extensive experience reinforced his assuredness in his role as a world history teacher.

Trey and Catherine considered how their students learned. In this way, they saw their students to their instructional decisions. But, their decisions were less a product of the current students in their class and more framed by their cumulative understanding of students that they have taught. All four of the teachers leveraged the perceived needs of their students in the content and strategies they selected in their world history classes. Typically, the participants selected U.S. focused content as a way to connect their students to the world, with the exception of Trey who was more focused on his students' needs in his self-guided presentations. In each case, the teachers saw these choices as responsive to classes and a fulfillment of their roles as world history teachers. They likely would frame this as their role as teachers, but it also represented their assertion of power and position as world history teachers.

### **Resources as Guides**

Resources both open and shut windows for teachers. Teachers can use resources such as textbooks as jumping off points for their instruction or as ways to limit what they teach or assess. The participants in this study showed how both of these approaches are possible. All four participants extensively used resources beyond what districts provided but Catherine and Trey

also bounded their assessments and instructional decision making by district-provided textbooks. Evelyn did not issue her district's textbook to the students but did use extra resources that came with it. Thomas did not have a textbook that to issue to students and often found online resources students could access with the Chromebooks he had in his classroom. For all participants, the resources had significant impacts on the content they assessed students on and how they discussed the content included in their world history courses.

Catherine and Trey both used textbooks as guides for the progressions of the course and a basis for student knowledge. Catherine felt that the textbook helped her to adhere to the state standards because she had a textbook that had been aligned to the State's curriculum. She had often thought about following a more thematic or even regional approach to world history, but she explained that going in order was also easier for students: "There's so much content that it just makes it easier to follow the order in the textbook" (C. Tudor, personal interview, She and Mary had developed study guides that went along with the textbook because they wanted to ask questions that "provoked deeper thinking than the textbook ones did". In her Imperialism study guide, Catherine asked comprehension questions like "What was Africa like before European colonialism? Why were Europeans kept out for so long?". Each section seemed to have questions that focused on the European interactions. Her textbook's two chapters on Imperialism centered on actions in Africa, China and Japan, areas which during the nineteenth century did not have much interaction with the United States. She also supplemented heavily with primary sources, role play activities, and lectures with outside research. But in the end, the textbook was an anchor for students and in some ways, Catherine too. Her use of the textbook grounded her curiosity in an historical trajectory that helped pace her instruction and defined on what students

were to be assessed. In essence, the text acted as an artifact for Catherine because it reinforced boundaries and streamlined her instruction to the expected storylines of world history education.

This approach to assessment and the textbook impacted how Catherine spoke of including the United States in her world history classes. Initially, Catherine mentioned that the book did not contain a lot of U.S. history and that she even skipped some, like the section on the U.S. Civil War (because she assumed the U.S. history classes in the middle school had adequately covered the topic). Likely her responses related to the text and how she assessed her students. Because Catherine did not assess students on material that the text did not include, her discussions that regarded current events that often seemed to connect to the United States in her descriptions and her “curiosities”, as she called them, were not evident on tests or big graded assignments. She did routinely have students complete a “current events assignment” and mentioned that the students were encouraged to bring in U.S.-based events with global connections such as the expanding COVID-pandemic or immigration regulations. These assignments were limited to turning in a write up of the article and possibly a brief classroom discussion. They were not included on any other assessments. Catherine’s use of the textbook as a way to ground her assessments, therefore, brought her back to the state standards and offered clarity for her students on what was expected. Her emphasis on textbook-included information masked some of the ways in which she drew on the United States as part of her content and guiding interest in understanding world events and phenomena.

Trey had similar notions about textbooks. He argued that when students were absent he did not feel they could be accountable for material covered in class, so instead he made certain to follow the textbook closely. In his elaborate presentations, he included the pertinent sections of the textbook so that students could refer back to it as needed. Trey commented that he faithfully



referred to the textbook, but that it lacked the depth of knowledge that he wanted his students to have. He repeatedly mentioned that his world history textbook was too thin and short on specific content, and always countered his own concerns with an argument that this was the book that his district provided. He believed that the textbook was a leveler for students--they could all be held accountable for and have access to that material. The textbook guided his instructional practices and although he spent extensive personal time creating presentations that students could work through on their own, he still centered all instruction on the chronology and boundaries of content that the textbook had. Trey mentioned that the textbook had limited coverage of the United States and that this limited its inclusion in his world history course. Similar to Catherine, the textbook acted as an artifact for Trey, one that signaled expert content and an accepted narrative of world history.

Also, like Catherine, he added details about the United States into his instruction without assessing them. While Trey used the textbook as the determining factor in the progression and direction of content, he also created the elaborate presentations that were his primary form of instruction. These presentations were slideshows that led students through a visual interpretation of history. Trey often uploaded these presentations that could have easily formed the basis of lectures to google classroom and students worked their way through them during and outside of class time. Each slide had multiple photographs, graphs, charts, political cartoons or video clips with questions that paired with sections of the textbook. In essence, Trey had created his own text or self-guided lecture that students navigated. He spent extensive time on these finding the right image or video: "I usually try to find a film clip that, I go YouTubing all the time and I'm very, very particular. I mean sometimes it takes me hours to find something..." (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 8, 2020). Trey's attention to aesthetics and details became the core of

his instruction. These resources, which he also sold on an online teacher site, centered the messages about world history trends and events that students received. In his world history presentations, the United States was present. Even if his textbook barely mentioned the United States, he included the United States in presentations on industrialization and imperialism. In both, he highlighted U.S. actions either through inventions during the Industrial Revolution or through military and government actions in Latin America and the Pacific during Imperialism. Trey explained he saw the United States as “keeping up with the Joneses” during this time:

I mean there were literally people who said that in essence. The Theodore Roosevelts of the world. You know, we either have to get involved in this, you know global game, if you want to call it that. I mean it sounds like a terrible term to use the word game, but it was actually used by Russia and Britain (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 22, 2020).

Trey also discussed how the Spanish-American War was “the game-changer in American history” in terms of entering global conversations and conflicts (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 22, 2020). This emphasis on growing power showed in his slides even if he was not assessing them on it.

Both Catherine and Trey developed their assessment practices and some of their instructional choices around the textbooks that their students had. They did this with practical obligations in mind, attendance and access. Yet, their actual instruction did include the United States through inventions, the adoption of Enlightenment ideas, and the Spanish-American War. They also used American-designed textbooks that factored in U.S. perspectives on the structure of world history courses implicitly. Willinsky (1999) wrote that Western education is grounded

in imperialist notions of the world. While his writing was over two decades ago, the topics that both Catherine and Trey borrowed from their respective world history textbooks suggest that the approach has not changed; the books approach imperialism specifically from the viewpoint of the West, which easily includes the United States, by categorizing characteristics of assimilation and benefits of being colonized.

It would be impossible to imagine that Evelyn or Thomas could escape these practices either. Although both used their textbook resources rarely, they still had the “traditional” textbook trajectory of world history as their understanding. Evelyn had a textbook available to her and her students, but she found that the students would not read the full textbook. She used summaries of chapters and sections from another textbook that she could share with students. Evelyn said that this approach was unusual for her school and specific to her world history class, but she found the students would read the shorter summaries and student buy-in was her primary goal. Regardless of which form of the textbook that Evelyn was using, she was supplying her students with an abbreviated version of the same Western and therefore U.S.-centered approach to world history. Many of the other resources she shared were also from publishing companies that make textbooks. Her handouts on industrialization only included information about Europe (mostly Western) and the United States. There was no discussion of goods or raw materials that came from other regions of the world. Because she used abbreviated versions, they were even more focused on basic information and important people like Thomas Edison. Because Evelyn’s main focus was to help her students pass the course, she did not go outside of these palatably short resources to globalize the information.

Thomas’s school did not have textbooks that they issued to students, although there was a class set that students could use while in class. He, instead, largely used resources he found

online, created or borrowed from others. Thomas viewed this as a positive aspect of his teaching because he tried to find the most current information and perspectives that he could. He was, he acknowledged, still deeply influenced by some typical expectations of content that textbooks would govern. As he explained, “I don’t want to be the teacher that other teachers talk about who didn’t teach a big event like World War II” (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020). In this way, even without a textbook governing his path, Thomas had a sense of how U.S. students are taught world history and what should be included even if he was constructing his class thematically. Essentially, he was using a textbook resource even if it wasn’t one being given to his students.

While the four participants used resources other than textbooks in their courses, the typical textbook approach to world history still played a part in their courses. Even Thomas who least used traditional sources for factual information and narratives of world history still had the ideas of specific events to highlight that traditional texts assume. Additionally, except for Thomas, the teachers relied heavily on textbook knowledge as boundaries for their assessments potentially as Nancy Patterson, Sherri Horner, Prentice Chandler and Robert Dahlgren (2013) noted in their work that teachers in states with tests believed they had less freedom to choose the content they included. By relying on standards-aligned texts for assessment, three of the participants limited the subjects that they emphasized. In this way, they reinforced content that affirmed Western, which included the United States, priorities and views (Blaut, 2012). The participants were understandably conscious of what resources their students all had access to for assessment purposes, but by relying on those resources they suggested that the other perspectives that they brought into class were peripheral in spite of their hopes to deepen or stretch student understanding of the world.

## **Complicated Understanding of Standards**

Not all states have separate world history standards, but the State where this study took place had era-based world history standards and has for over a decade. Just before this study took place, an updated set of standards had been released but were not in full effect until the following school year. Not only did the state where the study took place have a world history graduation requirement, but the state test also included world history questions, although relatively few. Because of modifications to the state social studies standards, the participants all mentioned that either they or their colleagues had spent time with the new ones. The participants discussed the need to follow and cover the standards, but also all expressed that these particular standards had a great deal of flexibility for their instructional decisions. This sentiment centered on a refrain for each standard that offered examples that could be taught but implied that the examples were neither mandatory nor exhaustive. While each participant noted the agency, they had to choose content, they still perceived the standards as limiting in some ways. This dissonance between their acknowledged flexibility of the content expectations and their perception that they had to account for each was not unlike Avner Segall's (2003) findings that teachers felt limited by state tests even while acknowledging otherwise. These participants recognized the standards as having sway in what they taught while acknowledging that the standards were not as prescriptive as they sometimes imagined them to be.

The standards were significant for all of the participants even if their adherence to them was indirect. Evelyn was the one participant who had spent little time with the world history standards. Through the resources and assessments that her colleagues gave her, the standards were accounted for. She said that in her U.S. history class she had spent more time looking at them, but in world history her colleagues had already made certain that there was alignment.

When asked about the standards and her instructional choices, she commented on how they were present because she followed the major concepts that the other world history teachers had told her that she needed to cover. Therefore, the standards had a presence in her teaching of world history. It was simply indirect. She did say that if she wasn't drawing on their standards-aligned assessments, she probably would have felt a need to pay more attention as a first-year teacher. Evelyn's sense of detachment from world history standards was largely due to the work of her colleagues and that she had one section. Evelyn also already knew that she would not be teaching the course next year. Her familiarity with the U.S. standards (and content) also impacted her teaching. Because Evelyn spent considerable time with U.S. content and standards, she noted that she made connections in class all the time. For example, Evelyn highlighted the financial impact of the American Revolution on France, nearby factories when she discussed the Industrial Revolution and the layout of Chicago when encouraging students to imagine industrial cities in England. Her understanding and experience with U.S. history and standards motivated her world history choices and regularly involved the United States in the world.

In some similar ways to Evelyn, Trey also felt that he did not need to be overly concerned with the details of the standards. They had always worked as a department to create pacing guides and choose textbooks that were based on the standards; world history was no exception to this. Trey said, "The priority is the standards, the state standards, the framework we developed as PLCs and as a district and department and do what is expected of me to do and have a little bit of wiggle room within units" (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 10, 2020). In Trey's eyes, he taught to the standards because that was what was expected of him, but how he did that and using what content was something he acknowledged having freedom to do. He knew he had freedom but seemed unlikely to state that too widely. He viewed the standards as having a power

to which he was beholden and in this way limiting his instructional freedom (Crocco & Livingston, 2017). He did not see this as something that someone was watching him do, but something done out of obligation and duty. The world history standards were a representation of the hierarchy in which he taught and one that he wanted to be perceived as following as a good team player might. This played into the way he spoke about including the United States in his world history course. In the initial interview, Trey implied that he kept the United States to the periphery in his world history class: “When I get into World War II or the Cold War, it feels like I'm teaching World History. I mean, I'll go three or four days without bringing up America at all because I'm dealing with the rise of fascism in Europe. So, it depends on the topic and the unit” (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). In this statement, he upholds the standards and expectations of him as a world history teacher, only incorporating U.S. history where necessary. By the fourth interview, Trey reflected more openly that even if the United States was not implied in the standards, he was still teaching through his national lens:

But as a social studies teacher, an American social studies teacher, who during his sixth hour has to give all of his students options every single day to say the Pledge of Allegiance, do we talk about America? Yeah. Yeah. It's America. We live here. The United States of America is going to get brought up. Yes. It's reasonable to imply that (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020).

Trey's shifting perception of his own teaching may have been a product of the time to reflect on his teaching or a comfort in expressing his views as the interviews progressed. Regardless, Trey recognized his own background and location influenced how he enacted the standards and included the United States in his world history classes.

Catherine similarly held up the standards as something that she needed to follow. She taught in a district concerned about state test scores and she saw her teaching of world history as something that was part of those expectations. She also, like Trey, recognized that no one was actually checking on her teaching every standard. She also felt they were useful guides for her and Mary to think about as they planned. She used them as a guide along with her textbook and when asked about specific standards would explain the way she approached it and what she did not teach of the examples given. She looked at the standards for what was in them and also what was not. Again, guided by her own intellectual curiosity, Catherine noted that Latin America, Australia and the United States were not in the standards very often, especially the first two. She was more interested in these other areas not being present, in part because she was less familiar with their history. Her logic was sensible: if regions of the world are not included in world history standards when would students learn about them? Whereas, from Catherine's perspective the United States has its own set of history standards woven through multiple grades. When asked what it said that the United States was not specifically named in this State's standard regarding the Cold War, she did suggest that it would be impossible to not include it in her instruction. In these exchanges, Catherine exemplified a place that standards may hold for many teachers, a boundary that can keep out content. At the same time, Catherine's own knowledge played a role in crossing those boundaries.

Because Thomas was teaching world history thematically, did that mean that he ignored the state standards since they were era-based? Thomas probably had spent the most time carefully considering the standards. After mapping out his themes and lengths of units, Thomas read through the standards in order to best fit them into particular themes and units. In the end, he had reallocated all of the standards. He added them to his curriculum map, initially written out



and explained and then listed on later units as his time became more scarce. He would double check his list during and after units to ensure that they were “covered”. He mentioned that these standards gave him flexibility and suggestions. If he did not feel he had adequately taught the standard, he looked at the examples offered as options “to check the box” and meet the standard (T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Thomas said that his process of applying the standards helped him: “Because there is, I think, at first whenever I do a new thing, I maybe feel bogged down and I think World History standards are so huge and cover so much information that when I focus more on covering everything I’m just constantly feeling like a failure, because I can’t do it” ((T. McCririe, personal interview, March 5, 2020). By starting with the themes and then looking at the standards, Thomas seemed more confident that he was teaching more of them than he might otherwise have done.

Thomas did not suggest, however, that the standards defined everything he should teach. He clarified the role of the standards in the process he explained above. The standards were for him a “second thought”:

I told you that we kind of filled in what we did and then put the standards in where they belong in this matrix or whatever. But they also are helpful, I think, more helpful than the previous ones in the way that they’re written because the previous standards wrote things in a way where it included very specific content in the wording of the standard itself (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, Thomas enjoyed what he saw as the freedom of the new standards to make content decisions that reflected his students. In the standard about political revolutions of the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the other participants admitted that they spent less time on the Haitian Revolution than some of the other prominent revolutions of the era, but Thomas viewed the wording of the standards as an invitation to delve into the Haitian Revolution over the American. He thought that the lingering issues of the Haitian Revolution might be of greater interest to his students than centering the American Revolution in a world context. Thomas' relationship with the standards was not completely unlike those of the other participants, he felt he should adhere to them, but also recognized leeway within them. The standards enabled him to de-emphasize or center the United States in world history where he saw fit.

### **Discussion**

This chapter explored how elements of the participants' communities and resources they used affected their instructional decision making for their world history classes. While the previous discussion chapter dealt with how the participants thought about the United States as content included in their world history courses, this chapter answered the question of what factors influenced the participants' instructional choices. It bears repeating that ideological beliefs and understandings of historical significance and patterns impact how the participants engage with the role of world history teachers, but these are other factors that help shape these views and teacher planning. In turn, these influences impact how the participants bound their figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). The participants in the study discussed various members of their world history community, including students and colleagues, as well as resources they relied on in their planning such as textbooks and state standards. These factors acted in concert with their views on including the United States in their courses.

Community in teaching might seem to mean a single class, the teacher and her students, but teachers may often include others who influence their decision making. The presence of this community can impact how the teachers see their role and obligations as world history teachers. In this way, the teachers not only decide who influences their role as a world history teacher, but how they see themselves as embedded within hierarchies of power (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Leander 2004). One could argue that for these participants their communities consisted of individuals and groups to whom they felt accountable, which helped to shape their practice. To their colleagues, they were expected to keep pace and to help shape the content that was taught. To their students, all shared a desire to connect them to world events and share in an understanding of the world. While they all acknowledged autonomy and agency in their instruction, they also felt they were responsible to include and exclude certain topics. For Catherine, this meant trying to decenter the West (and the U.S. as part) through more attention to Africa and Asia. She also sought to connect those histories to her students' lives through topics like immigration. For Thomas, he prioritized the students' cultural backgrounds when he planned instruction and might be seen along the spectrum of culturally relevant education that Brittany Aronson and Judson Laughter (2016) describe. He was adamant that his students' backgrounds needed to be part of his curricular choices and lead him to emphasize some content instead of others. Each had colleagues who affirmed the inclusion of these narratives in their world history courses. In these ways, the participants enacted practices and made decisions based on their perceptions of what their communities encouraged or needed. They made these decisions in relation to their past experiences and understanding of their roles as world history teachers in particular settings. Teachers make decisions based on not only the actions of students in the room but also their understanding of student need and collegial experience.

Trey and Evelyn leveraged their relationships with their communities differently in their roles as world history teachers. Their roles impacted how others learned about the United States in world history. In Trey's case the department expectations of pacing and content, even in choosing a textbook that he disliked, had an extraordinary impact on his teaching. Holland and Leander (2004) spoke of the ways in which individuals uphold the power of institutions and hierarchies. Trey did this by also exerting a great deal of power over his colleagues' instructional decision making. He did this by telling his fellow world history teachers that some content such as the Cold War or parts of the World Wars could be skipped because it was taught in U.S. history courses the year before. In assigning whole eras or specific content to one course or the other, teachers create value judgments on how historical events are constructed, either nationally or globally. This likely comes from a place of convenience, but also potentially ignores educational aims and connections that can be made in approaching a topic from multiple vantage points. Additionally, Trey's power and place in the history teaching hierarchy at his school impacts more than his classroom. This shows how teachers influence and are influenced by their communities. These roles and identities are formed and reformed through these interactions as well as the perceptions of them.

Evelyn's choices impacted her students directly as opposed to her colleagues. She initially both wanted to make sure that she upheld the integrity of a system that extended long before her, but also to serve her students in a system that had not worked for them. She did so by changing readings that limited specific details and added more U.S. parallels that she was teaching in her U.S. history courses. Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) explained that novice teachers can use their knowledge to challenge hierarchies and liberate themselves from these power structures that communities can reinforce in one's figured world. For Evelyn, she does

not fully liberate herself from the structure that her colleagues are part of, but she does use her understanding of her student's needs to shift instruction and make other decisions that increased her reliance on the United States for comparison. As a novice to the community, she is still able to generate change within her figured world (Holland et al., 1998). Her willingness to do so shows how she made decisions that push discourses and initial expectations of her role.

Along these lines, the resources that the educators use also positioned them in hierarchies of schooling. State standards and textbooks based on them permeated the decision making of these teachers. Studies have suggested that state standards can seem to limit their freedom (Crocco & Livingston, 2017) or generally affect their instructional decision making (Cimbricz, 2002). The participants all alluded to some level of concern over teaching the standards, although for all but Thomas they felt that their textbooks or colleagues had already seen to this need. This positioned the standards as having some place of power over the individuals in a Foucauldian manner that Holland et al. (1998) suggested was part of how individuals respond to power relationships in figured worlds. The surveillance that the teachers perceived from the state tests and standards did not reflect the way they discussed the freedom that the state standards also provided them. In some ways, much like the participants discussed the ways that they included the United States in world history courses in the last chapter was how they described the standards. The standards were something they knew they were expected to use (unlike teaching U.S. history during world classes) and their initial responses verified this. Yet, as they looked at the standards and discussed the construction of them, they admitted that there was a great deal of “wiggle room” in them. Other states might not have such room in the standards, but Thomas noted that he found the new standards to be much more open than the last (Girard et al., 2021). The standards act as artifacts for the participants as they reinforce teaching and content

expectations for world history. Teachers understand standards as guides for their instruction. Even in revised form, these were a signal to participants of the cultural and curricular expectations of world history.

There the comparison ends. While all four teachers acknowledged that they had freedom in their teaching regardless of the role of colleagues or any additional factors, they did not all feel that they had the same power. The two teachers who had taught the least amount of time, Evelyn and Thomas, exercised the most agency in their teaching. One could argue that this comes from their less senior status (Calabrese Barton and Tan, 2020; Holland et al., 1988) but in both cases there were other factors. For Evelyn, she knew that she would teach this class only once by the time she started it giving her the sense that she should make her instruction accessible and foster success for the students in her class. She additionally did not teach in the same building as the other educators who taught world history in her district. The lack of proximity also made her feel disconnected from what those other teachers were doing and able to approach her instruction as she wished. She mentioned that her U.S. history classes were more in line with the teachers around her because they taught in the same hallway. For Thomas, the atmosphere in which he taught also added to his sense of agency. Thomas felt emboldened by the culture of his building to attempt new approaches to the curriculum generally or in daily lessons. He also viewed the standards as supportive of his methods because he had spent time examining the language with his curricular approach already formed. Conversely, Catherine and Trey would not have said they were without power but might have said that their freedom was in the strategies they used over the content (Girard et al, 2021).

The communities of which they were part and the resources they used mattered to the participants. These elements and their perceived impact influenced how the participants always

made decisions as world history teachers. But these factors all played into how the United States threaded into their courses. The sources they used, the people they valued in their choices and the standards to which they at least nominally felt beholden all shaped the content and perspectives that they shared in their courses. These factors were, according to the participants, more influential than how they thought about master narratives of U.S. or Western history in these courses. That did not mean that they did not reinforce those master narratives, but rather they did not consider how they might be teaching them as consistently as they did these other factors. They also didn't consider in depth how their communities and resources shaped their actions and perception of their identities as world history teachers. Educators make decisions, as the participants implied, on many levels daily and through these factors framed messages about what was considered acceptable in their actions as world history teachers.

## CHAPTER 7

### FRAMING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD

In the first findings chapter, I explored participants' views and understandings of teaching world history broadly and specifically in relation to U.S. history. In the second findings chapter, I detailed how the participants' described influences on instructional decision making and how it applied to the inclusion of the United States in their world history courses. In this chapter, I examine how the participants' instructional decisions position the United States in relation to the rest of the world. Although witnessing the participants' instruction might be one way to consider this matter, this study relied, instead, on the explanations and artifacts provided by participants. This was due to the COVID-19 outbreak but offered the affordance of viewing instructional decisions through the teachers' explanatory statements. Because individuals define the boundaries of their own figured worlds (Holland et al., 1988; Urrieta, 2007b), the opportunity to center the participants' descriptions illuminates their navigation of their roles as world history educators. Through their statements about their instruction, I analyze how they see the impact of their choices and how their teaching reinforced and challenged ideas and broader cultural narratives about the United States in relation to other nations.

From the teachers' explanations of their instructional practices, various narratives emerged. These narratives included: the United States as an example of democracy and progress for the rest of the world, the United States as an extension of western power and settler colonialism, the United States as a modern power, and the United States as a separate entity. While these ideas are at times intertwined or at other times oppositional, these portrayals of the United States were nonetheless present in the participants' instructional choices. Additionally, the participants' presentation and positioning of the United States in their world history



instruction was sometimes explicitly delivered and sometimes implicit. Even when the United States was explicitly taught and included as content, the participants' framing of the United States in relation to the rest of the world was often unintentional. The teachers drew on motivations and considerations they explained in the other findings chapters while not always examining the messages that their lessons might send to students. As discussed in chapter 5, the participants were often concerned with routine issues of pacing and resource access as opposed to examining the ways in which their own conceptions of the United States as a global figure were woven into their instruction. This preoccupation muddles the figured worlds considered in the study because the participants may not have identified the presence of these cultural concepts without being asked. I contend that participants bound their figured worlds in certain ways. This process reflects the power of their professional narratives and the pervasiveness of American beliefs and ideas in their practice. As part of the interview process for this study, however, participants identified some of these ideas in their own practice while suggesting that their acknowledgement of these influences was a product of being asked. Although thoughtful about their teaching practices, these educators focused their attention elsewhere, to coverage, time constraints and available resources. It is within this context that I explore the ways that their instruction reinforced and occasionally pushed at established views of the United States in the world.

### **The United States as an Example of Democracy and Progress**

An exemplar is a model. A person or a thing can become a model for others by being stated to be such or by unintentional positioning at times. In the case of the United States in world history instruction, both of these paths were present in the instructional practices of the participants. They brought the United States into their instruction through choices of activities,

comparisons to events in other nations, and reliance on their own historical understandings and knowledge. At times, the United States was an obvious example of the application of Enlightenment ideas through its documents of independence and early government. In other ways, some participants positioned the United States as an obvious example of industrial progress. Some also summarized the tensions of the Cold War through U.S. sports victories and propaganda. There were many motivations to do this, but each participant would argue that these examples were convenient and known to the teachers and presumably, students as well. While one might argue that these are accessible ways to draw on student prior knowledge from U.S. history class, they can also be viewed through their positioning of the United States in relation to other nations.

One of the earliest inclusions of the United States in the State's World History curriculum is the American Revolution. Certainly, the Americas are included as part of the Columbian Exchange, colonization and the Atlantic Slave Trade, but the conclusion of the American Revolution marks the creation of a nation separate from the government of Great Britain and opens a path to discussing the United States as a separate sovereign entity. This period, and the American Revolution as part of it, signifies the growth of Enlightenment ideals about government such as separation of powers and unalienable rights. The American Revolution chronologically precedes the French and Haitian Revolutions, among others, in trying to expand citizens' rights.

As a result, one might expect that the participants would include the American Revolution in their course, but they did so sparingly. They all mentioned the American Revolution but featured it as just one of the revolutions of the era. For example, Evelyn's class completed a Venn diagram that compared the French, American and Haitian revolutions. The

other world history teachers in her district built the French and American Revolutions into the activity and then teachers chose a third revolution on their own. Evelyn said, “we combined them all” about the revolutions because students had discussed the Enlightenment in the previous semester (E. St Pierre, personal interview, April 10, 2020). “I wanted them to see [how] this [Enlightenment] thinking swept over all the revolutions” (E. St Pierre, personal interview, April 10, 2020). By approaching the American Revolution in this way, Evelyn suggested that the event did not set the United States apart. This reflected early interview responses from Evelyn and the other participants who talked about downplaying the United States as part of their world history courses. Evelyn’s (and other participants’) responses suggested that they saw their role and identities as world history educators as teaching the rest of the world and limiting the United States. It was an effect of a professional narrative and expectation that defined the world curriculum as a study of largely other nations and regions and appeared ingrained among the participants.

Still, she and the other participants mentioned that they discussed the American Revolution as first (which it was chronologically), but also as different from the other revolutions of the period. Thomas explained,

When I talk about the constitution or the written government there, it is unique that it started in that way. However, the fact that the United States was an ignored colony except for the taxes... Even in their revolution, a lot of it was trying for those people to maintain their status quo. For the most part, it had been functioning without British involvement except when it came to the French...They were mostly on their own to begin with. So then when they got

interfered with, when that freedom was taken away during that war, they were like, "No, we just want to go back to... We want to fight for our independence, which is kind of what we already had for a long time (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

In many ways, Thomas's explanation that the American Revolution was unlike the other revolutions made the event an exemplar. Unlike other countries, from Thomas' perspective, the United States had not struggled to self-rule. On the contrary, he positions these early U.S. citizens as self-reliant and following an almost preordained path to independence from Great Britain. This portrayal of the United States as self-reliant echoes Lipsett's (1997) explanation that American exceptionalism is based on such characteristics seen as unique to the United States. Within this theme of self-reliance, Thomas built upon existing values that the United States was uniquely situated to be a sovereign state while the French and Haitians (under French rule) had to push against their own heritage:

They had always been used to a monarchy. And so just removing the monarchy when everybody is used to a monarchy, it's not as easy to reject that. They're used to one strong military leader to take. So, when the opportunity came, they almost fell back into what they were used to almost. In the United States, it didn't. I think that's one big difference is to understand the concept or how those people might've felt at the time versus how it was actually in practice (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

Thomas' intention with this framing was to show how the French and Haitians faced greater challenges and possibly were more courageous in their actions. Yet, by the way he built upon

narratives of the natural progression of American independence, he situated the United States' actions as separate and a model of progress. In juxtaposing these revolutions in this way, he attempted to highlight the challenges the French faced, while making the American Revolution seem a foregone conclusion.

Like Thomas, Catherine saw the American Revolution and subsequent government as a sensible chain of events. Catherine framed the American Revolution as an example of how it led to the Constitution. From her perspective as a U.S. government teacher, she saw it as the logical connection to highlight how the Constitution positions the U.S. government as unique compared to others:

I guess the U.S. is sort of revolutionary in that, to some extent, that we have a written document that people are swearing to uphold when they take the oath of office. And this is where I combine my AP Government, and actually civics background with this idea that instead of having a king be in charge; it's actually a document with a body of people to govern a society... You've got this revolutionary idea of having a rotating group of people who can constantly be in charge and uphold that constitution. And so, even in modern times when we talk about this coronavirus and the idea of elections. Well, the president can suspend the elections, it's in the constitution that they will be held on this day... And we've upheld these ideas for 235 years, which is interesting (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 14, 2020).

Catherine discussed combining her AP Government and world history knowledge, and yet she was also drawing on what Guarneri (2017) referred to as special qualities and characteristics that are viewed as setting the United States apart. Guarneri and Davis (2008) discussed this outlook as part of a civic mission that American history, and arguably government, teachers have. Catherine in addition to teaching world history, taught both U.S. history and government. While she discussed throughout the interviews seeing world history differently, she still seemed called to these other roles and identities in her world history instruction. In referencing these ideas about what makes American democracy unique, Catherine placed distance between the United States and in this case France and Haiti.

The notion that the United States represents envious achievements and progress carried into how the participants discussed the Industrial Revolution. World history curriculum often approaches the Industrial Revolution from its roots in Great Britain to innovations in Western and Central Europe with small mentions of the United States. Each of the participants recognized contributions of the United States to the era. As with the topic of the American Revolution, the participants said that they avoided centering the United States as part of their Industrial Revolution unit. Trey stated,

I start with Great Britain. Then I move to the continent of Europe, and how the French, the Germans and the chemical industry and so on and so forth, but within that second part where you go from Belgium and France and Germany, then you bring the United States into it...it's just part of the story. It's not about America, it's about America's role in this bigger thing called the Industrial Revolution...But in world history it enters the discussion when it

enters the discussion, but it does enter the discussion (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 10, 2020).

Trey's explanation followed the traditional path to discussing the Industrial Revolution, highlighting the spread of industrialization across Europe and bringing in the United States where he believed the nation fit. This implied that the United States is like any other country during the Industrial Revolution in the context of his world history teaching. Yet as he continued to discuss the Industrial Revolution in another interview, he said, "You bring up that it began with the British and stuff, but so much of it really ends up being related (to the U.S.) because of technology. I mean, Edison, good gosh, I mean, all this stuff that comes out of this era from America is remarkable" (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 15, 2020). This second statement about his teaching suggested that Trey likely positioned the United States as having more impact than his earlier comment indicated. When he began to consider his framing of the content, he acknowledged that he saw the U.S.'s role as critical as an exemplar of what the Industrial Revolution contributed to global society. The British might seem a more likely focus as they industrialized first, but Trey indicated that the innovations of those like Edison led him to discuss how the United States shaped and led industrialization internationally. Trey's enthusiasm for U.S. innovation during the Industrial Revolution reflected his understanding of U.S. history as someone who grew up in the industrial Midwest during part of its manufacturing heyday. His own regional connections influenced his role as a world history teacher in this case as he fell back on portrayals of the United States as a global industrial power.

Much like Trey's explanation of industrialization, Catherine used the example of U.S. immigration during this period as an effect of push factors in Germany and Central Europe

generally. Catherine explained that the textbook doesn't address U.S. immigration specifically, but she drew on it because,

It'll be something they'll talk about because Bismarck is redistributing land in Germany, and you'll have a lot of farmers who need to move and the U.S. is recruiting people to come and move here because we have no people but vast tracks of land that need settled, so American entrepreneurs or I'm not sure who, the American government, come over to Germany and recruit Germans to move to the United States, places like Michigan, Minnesota, and be farmers in these regions and have white Americans from sea to shining sea (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020).

Catherine spoke in this moment and many others of trying to help connect seemingly-distant historical content to her students' lives. Arguably, this is good practice--helping students access their cultural funds of knowledge. Catherine used her nuanced understanding of history as well as her own views about the content she was teaching (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). She expressed her knowledge of causation in world history by addressing the United States as the answer to another nation's problem of land access. This is also a reasonable argument based on the push-pull factors of U.S. immigration in the nineteenth century, but in doing so, she positioned the United States as the solution to others' needs. It created an image of the United States as a model for others, even if this was not her primary goal. Catherine's stated intention was found in her efforts to tie the content to her students:

Catherine: I try to connect it back to the kids.



Erin: and that connection is really inherently the US?

Catherine: Yes, but I'll try to connect it to their families' stories about how they came to the United States. I'll try to connect it to them (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020).

Catherine recognized (when asked) that her approach drew upon the role of the United States during this era but felt that helping her students make sense of the content through their families' experiences was more important. Catherine's reaction suggested that her placing of the United States as a solution and model of land distribution was secondary to its usefulness to student understanding. This emphasized both a practical element of her decision making and how her reply masked the broader narrative about American opportunity with which students were likely already familiar. Her instruction built upon already present narratives in society (Holland et. al, 1998).

Similarly, Thomas placed the United States as an example and model when framing the Cold War era for his students. Thomas spoke of the Cold War and teaching the era through his own cultural connections. When he chose content from the era, he used U.S.-involved events,

I was thinking about the Olympics and Miracle on Ice, which are all bits and pieces. When I think of the Cold War, it does, even in teaching, seem more nebulous because it's not a chronological explanation in the same way [as other events]. There's the space race and the arms race and the sports race and there's all these different things that worked at different speeds in different ways. And, the imperialistic military race (T. McCririe, personal interview, May 8, 2020).

It would have been challenging not to have the United States loom large in content about the Cold War. Yet Thomas, who also spoke of teaching the Vietnam and Korean conflicts, centered the United States even through his mention of the film *Miracle on Ice*, a dramatic Olympic U.S. hockey victory over the dominant Soviet Union. Thomas also returned to how these events fit into his thematic approach to the course and curriculum (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd, 1991), but embedded in his outline was a narrative that reinforced the ways in which the United States served as a model of western actions during the conflict.

In each of the instances above, the participants' perceptions of U.S. innovations, experiences and opportunities shaped how they included the United States in their world history courses. While they were accessing their own prior knowledge as well as that of their students, they also created an idea of the United States as an example or model for other countries to follow. Unintentionally perhaps, they reinforced specific notions of the United States as being a problem solver for other nations or a beacon of progress through innovations in government and technology.

### **The United States as an Extension of Western Empires**

At times, the participants framed the United States as a model that other nations could emulate. However, this was not the only way the participants explained the place of the United States in world history. An alternative view that the participants also exhibited was the United States as an extension of the West. In this scenario, the United States' actions and history reflected European roots and traditions although possibly building upon them. This positioning of the United States suggested that the nation was only influenced by Western society as opposed to the many other immigrant groups that came to the United States. The United States, in this portrayal, reflects Eurocentric thinking (Blaut, 2012; Conrad, 2019) and a denial of the

multicultural roots of U.S. society (Banks, 2012). It does, however, open a path to examine the settler colonial legacy of the United States as part of Western imperialism which some of the participants touched upon in their instruction. Regardless of approach, the participants aligned United States' actions with European influences while often ignoring other regions and potential influences on U.S. society.

The participants aligned the United States with European events regularly. Catherine explained that when she teaches the first half of the twentieth century she focused on Western histories,

It's almost like the traditional formulation. It's going to be world imperialism, World War One, Depression, World War Two, and so it becomes much more European and American focused. And we won't talk so much about the Great Depression and its impact in South America, or the Great Depression and how it doesn't impact Japan so much (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020).

Catherine noted that her instruction centered on the West, of which the United States was part, but also that this was a “traditional” perspective. Even in noting this, Catherine wanted to move away from centering Western histories. Still, she expressed that path in her instruction through acknowledging that Jefferson’s writing of the Declaration of Independence drew on European philosophes:

I think really just the fact that the ideas aren't completely independent. They're not just like, "These are just American ideas. We're the only ones having these ideas." "Thomas Jefferson was brilliant." Well, he read other books and he borrowed their ideas,

and he came up with these things. And so, I think that a lot of the ideas are borrowed from other societies and they're not completely independent of what other people thought at the same time (C.

Tudor, personal interview, April 14, 2020).

The concepts to which Catherine alluded were ideas rooted in the European Enlightenment. She aligns Thomas Jefferson's ideas with the European philosophes who influenced his work. She suggested that these ideas were not separate from them but rather part of the larger European movement that linked American government to European philosophical traditions. Dozono (2020), Willinsky (1989), and Blaut (2012), warned about the limited perspectives that characterizing history through a Western perspective can imply. Yet, Thomas also used the United States as an extension of the Enlightenment, not as a separate event:

It's not the core of any lesson or unit. With the exception of, I think when it comes to the Enlightenment. I touch on it much more because I use the Enlightenment as... Enlightenment ideals, as examples of the founding of the United States. Because, it was... And even then the United States is almost piggybacking off of European ideas instead of using America for American sake (T.

McCrie, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

Thomas positioned the United States as an extension of European ideas and did not suggest that he did so for the sake of time or any reason other than how he viewed the U.S.'s beginnings. Less firm in her reasoning than Thomas, Evelyn presented the Enlightenment as a European movement of which the United States was part: "I talked about it maybe once and I was like, 'Okay, so these ideas are spreading over here too. And they're involved in what's happening with

America”” (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, April 10, 2020). Evelyn associated Enlightenment ideas as part of U.S. events, and seemed to imply that they were part of a simultaneous movement as opposed to separately developed. Although she did not use “we” or “us”, her use of “here” also characterized how her identity as a U.S. citizen implicitly informed her choices and explanations of them.

Trey similarly discussed the United States as part of a broader category, that is, Western nations. He explained that he focused “more broadly on the Western hemisphere” than the United States because it is a world history course (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). He mentioned including the United States in this category while downplaying its focus: “If I’m in the Age of Exploration that led to the Age of Conquest and Colonization, that led to the Atlantic slave trade, then I incorporate the impact of the slave trade on American society, and more broadly, the Western hemisphere” (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). Part of Trey’s logic was that “there’s a U.S. history teacher teaching that curriculum, specific to U.S. history, in a different classroom somewhere else.” He doesn’t want to “get over Americanized with world history”, and therefore stayed with broader geographic and cultural divisions that still included the United States, just didn’t foreground it (T. Lennon, personal interview, March 5, 2020). He saw this as not highlighting the United States in his world history course and leaving that to the U.S. courses, although one might argue that he was drawing on U.S. events without identifying these connections for his students.

While the participants deemphasized the United States in their world history classes by identifying it as part of other Western movements and actions, this also afforded the teachers an opportunity to position the United States as a co-conspirator and participant in settler-colonialism. In this way, the United States can be seen as an extension of the West. As part of a

group of Western nations vying for power over other regions, the United States becomes just another imperialist nation and suggests U.S. complicity in colonialism. Catherine discussed the United States as part of the Northern hemisphere that was a focus of world history courses. She equated the Northern hemisphere with Western influence on the Global South: “The other thing is that’s a lot of it is the northern hemisphere...I think the U.S. is quietly reaching, spreading its influence south of the Caribbean and we don’t really talk about that so much” (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020). Catherine’s statement showed awareness of the ways in which she could emphasize the United States as part of the West or in her words “the Northern hemisphere”. Instead of discussing U.S. actions specifically, she recognized that the extension of U.S. influence became part of Imperialist movements of a broader region. Catherine recognized that the United States engaged in imperialistic actions like European countries but fell short of addressing this in a more substantive or even non-Western way (Blaut, 2012; Prakash, 1994; Cooper, 1994). Her coverage likely reflects the systemic nature of Western thought (Bang, 2015). Other participants offered more direct instruction of these acts but still without changing the Western lens.

Seeing the United States as another example of imperialism, Evelyn showed maps of Great Britain and other countries. She began with European nations involved in the conquest of Africa, but then transitioned to the United States too:

I really like just showing that on a map, like them scrolling across  
and I think they can really grasp it. Not only did Great Britain go  
into Africa and do all these other things but we also went  
everywhere else within Imperialism and the idea of conquering  
other countries. So, I think that would be nice to just... Like I mean

we even have influence over these other countries still (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, April 15, 2020).

Evelyn discussed European imperialism, but quickly involved the United States' historic and continuing imperialism. When asked, Evelyn stated that she saw her strategy above as a way to show that the U.S. mirrored Western nations in its actions. As a newer teacher, she appeared influenced by her own learning of content and perspective (Mumby & Russell, 1992)

Evelyn didn't emphasize the role that the United States played in imperialism in the same ways that she emphasized European conquests, but she framed the United States as complicit in this activity. Trey, Thomas and Catherine also all sought to make students aware of the U.S. role in imperialism. Trey's approach was uneven; he had a section of his Imperialism presentation that centered around the U.S. actions in Latin America and the colonization of Hawaii. In the presentation, he included the United States as one of many examples of Western imperialism and even stated that he highlights Kipling's "White Man's Burden" but "doesn't connect it to the United States directly" although the poem was written about the U.S. actions in the Philippines. Again, while Trey included the United States in his teaching, in this unit he placed the nation in a narrative about many countries that he traced back to the dawn of modern European history:

...All the countries that industrialize are the ones that become the imperial powers. Then all the countries that become the imperial powers start competing for these resources which leads to World War I. So, all of these countries, you end up talking about them over and over again for a while, because one thing leads to the next that leads to the next, that leads to the next. So, Germany, Britain, France, Japan, the United States...there is this trend that you see

repeating over and over where the countries that you are talking about...and it all goes back to the start which goes back to the Renaissance, which is where it all begins, new ways of thinking about the world, challenging traditional thought, thinking about the world differently that leads to the Protestant Reformation and also the scientific revolution (T. Lennon, personal interview, April 15, 2020).

In his statement, Trey rolled the United States and Japan into Western ways of thinking. While he also included Japan as western, he does so by suggesting a dominance to European thinking that he considered both the countries as extending. He also did not include Japan as much in his Imperialism presentation as he did the moves of the United States. Trey viewed that as an acknowledgement of the U.S. role in historical context but didn't consider how this framing also might reflect cultural narratives that downplay events in which the United States might be negatively viewed.

Catherine and Thomas were more interested in drawing student attention to U.S. actions in order to hint at U.S. colonialism. Catherine, like Trey, included "White Man's Burden" by Kipling as a source in her classes. She felt that it made the students start to recognize the United States' role in this era:

Because they ask those questions. When we do imperialism and do Queen Liliuokalani's response to imperialism...and they'll be surprised... "oh wait , that's the US? Or like the White Man's Burden...that that's the US they're talking to about the Philippines? Wait, that makes no sense because the Philippines are



controlled by the Spanish” (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020).

Catherine emphasized European actions first, but she did want her students to acknowledge U.S. complicities in imperialism around the globe. Catherine taught about the Philippines and Hawaii to show how the United States drew on European examples: “The U.S. doesn’t get so much involved in Africa, but the U.S. might look at what the Europeans are doing in Africa and say, oh we need to expand our influence” (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 23, 2020). Catherine included content that showed the U.S. role, but still implied that the U.S. learned their actions based on Europe’s example. In this case, the United States was part of the West, but did not seem to originate their actions. Thomas was more directed in blaming the United States for its imperialistic tendencies. Thomas was invested in helping students see how the United States engaged in subjugation of others: “One of our big giant themes was on subjugation so we were going to cover racism and classism” (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020). In aligning the United States with the West, he wanted students to see the ways in which the United States was not living up to its ideals as a nation. But, more importantly for Thomas, he was using the United States as one more example of how imperialism and limiting the rights of others played out:

By doing this thematically, the goal is to generalize. So, if I give an example of the US, the goal for the students is that they understand that this isn’t just about the US, it’s about how societies react to this particular type of conflict. This is how it happened in the US; this is how it happened here (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020).

Catherine and Thomas both wanted their students to be aware of U.S. actions and framed them as extensions of others. Still, they pointed out the United States was involved in imperialism and subordination of other nations in a more pronounced sense than their colleagues. All four participants allied the U.S. initiatives with European ideas, and they did so by positioning this era from a Western perspective without attempting to take the view of those being colonized or considering the hierarchies of power involved (Prakash, 1994).

In the case of this theme, participants portrayed the United States as part of the West. They may have done so to show European influence on American society and government, or they may have done so as a way to explain “bad” behavior and actions of the United States in the context of other nations. Certainly, this framing of the United States in the world keeps the U.S. as part of global affairs but could also serve to lessen the complicity of the nation compared to or in concert with others.

### **United States as Modern Power**

By the end of World War II, the United States had an expanded role in the world. This influenced another pattern of how some participants positioned the United States in their courses as world power. Understandably, the United States entered into conversations about the World Wars and the post-war era. Yet in mentioning the United States in this era, the participants largely included the United States as exerting influence on other nations. This often came without a critical or nuanced lens of the limits of that power and prestige.

All of the participants mentioned that they felt that the United States as a world power after World War II was an unavoidable topic. Catherine introduced the Cold War to her class from the viewpoint of the United States as she introduced the era after World War II: “Well, I’m thinking about [my classes] a couple of weeks from now. There might be some U.S. perspective

at first, but it might be intertwined with even the Soviet perspective” (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020). Although she often wanted to emphasize African and Asian perspectives in her world course, she taught the Cold War through the United States. She mentioned including U.S. conflicts like Vietnam and Korea as well. While these were not U.S. military successes, using these events as the trajectory of the era highlights the superpower role that the United States held during that time period and affirms the exceptionalism of the U.S.’s history (Guarneri & Davis, 2008).

Evelyn also approached the Cold War in this way. She described a political cartoon analysis activity that she had directed. Evelyn said that she used a political cartoon showing the “Iron Curtain” during both her U.S. and world history classes. She asked different questions in the two classes, but her world questions still directed students to explore issues from the U.S./Western side. She asked, "What is happening? Why is there a divide? Who is looking under that curtain? There's industries on the other side? Why are there industries on the other side, what is the point of that?" Why would that be a thing that we don't want?" (E. St. Pierre, personal interview, May 12, 2020). In using the words “other” and “we”, Evelyn encouraged students to analyze the cartoon from the U.S. perspective. She also used the United States’ positioning in the cartoon as the side she identified with the U.S. had unpolluted air and more open space; it seemed the more pleasant side of the “Iron Curtain” on which to live and by asking why “we don’t want” the other side, she gave status to the United States. This once again emphasized her identification with the United States and its ideas through the use of first person. Thomas similarly said he did not try to position the U.S. but talked about ways in which he thought about the Cold War through U.S events like the Korean and Vietnam Wars that showed the U.S.’s actions framing the era. These approaches suggest what many post-colonial historians and

theorists suggest: Westerners, in this case U.S.-born teachers, fail to see a non-Western, non-United States or subaltern perspective in teaching about the rest of the world (Prakash, 1994; Gopal, 2019).

Thomas, Catherine and Evelyn were conscious of the U.S. role during the twentieth century in their teaching. An example of how these three participants thought about portraying this power in their teaching was illustrated in Catherine's approach. Catherine did want her students to consider how the United States' actions impacted other countries: "They'll participate, hopefully, in a democracy in a couple years, and they can see what the bigger picture is beyond, that their vote will make a difference in terms of how the U.S. plays a role with other countries" (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020). She both saw world history as a course where students would learn about the rest of the globe, but also a place for students to see how the United States had exercised their power. Catherine did not express this through first person but did associate U.S. events and her students, implying a connection between past and future events. The second half of the twentieth century was a logical place to build those connections while possibly fostering ideas of global responsibility and citizenship. Catherine, Thomas and Evelyn had structured content for the second half of the twentieth century around U.S. involvement and in doing so, had reinforced the ways in which the United States held global power during that era.

Trey's view of the second half of the twentieth century was, in many ways, different than that of the other three teachers. Like the others, he recognized the increased global participation of the United States. Unlike the other participants, he saw the era as a time when world history became that of the United States. He admitted that when he taught the Cold War he had not

previously thought about including non-aligned nations, for instance. In describing his instruction, he explained:

That's where it flips. I just said about U.S. history, there are chunks that it feels like it turns more into a World History class. In World History, that particular unit, it feels to me anyway. It becomes more like a US history class. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the Berlin crisis part one, part two, part three, it just... Kennedy and Truman Aid just like it feels like... And maybe another World History teacher would have a different view, but because I teach the same unit twice in different ways, it feels like, to me, it feels very, very much like US history (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020).

Trey saw his instruction of the Cold War in world history as a repeat of U.S. history and sometimes even a way to abridge content in his world history class. He saw the overlap between world and U.S. history as strong enough to encourage his other world history colleagues to sparingly teach the era. As the only teacher who taught both courses at his school, he felt secure in largely skipping the Cold War in world classes:

We at our school anyway,... get up through World War II. And maybe dabble in the Cold War. And here's the reason why. Is because of how the United States emerges out of World War II. A lot of second semester U.S. history feels almost like World History. Not all of it, but especially the Cold War. And the idea anyway, it's like with the wealth of information that needs to be

taught in World History, we do cover that timeframe in U.S.

history. So, the feeling is, we'll take care of it, like U.S. history (T.

Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020).

In both of these excerpts, Trey states not only the topics he taught in world history, but how he saw them as a path to limit world content that could only be replaced with U.S. history content. Through these choices, Trey more than centered the United States and its power in the history of the second half of the twentieth century. He reported that he made the second half of the twentieth century almost entirely about the United States. The other participants certainly also recognized and reinforced this positioning of the United States as a modern power, but Trey both through what he taught and what he omitted from the world history curriculum reinforced the United States as the dominant nation in recent world history. His own understanding of and experience in teaching the Cold War in U.S. history became the backdrop for his actions as a world history teacher (Urrieta, 2007b).

All of the participants wanted students to understand this era of world history as a space in which the United States held power. For Trey, the United States was so dominant that the United States became the world. For all of the participants, understanding the U.S. position and power was a means to recognizing their position in the world. Catherine, Evelyn, and Thomas were not naive to the role they saw the United States having, but they were less bold about U.S. events and actions taking the place of world history for their students.

### **The United States as Separate**

The participants frequently voiced the idea that their world history classes were a place to learn about the rest of the globe. In doing so, they sometimes left the United States out of world affairs. In essence, the United States was separated from the rest of the world, often by not being

mentioned nor included in specific events and eras. There have been times in world events such as the beginning of both World Wars when the U.S. government chose isolationism over direct entry into global conflict and therefore, the United States would be absent from lessons. Yet, the participants also omitted or diminished the role of the United States in events like the Great Depression or the Cold War in which the United States was significant. The teachers made these choices based on what the participants saw as a difference between the domains of U.S. and world history courses.

From the sections above, the United States was not set entirely apart from the rest of the world in the participants' courses. Yet, in other ways, the teachers did try to leave the United States out of the narrative or at least downplay its role. This omission of the United States follows from the traditional academic idea that world history and U.S. history need to be divided so that students can learn about the rest of the world during their limited time (Watt, 2012). Although scholars like Watt (2012), Bender (2006) and Guarneri (2008), among others, argue that the United States should be considered in a global context, the teachers in this study all embraced the separation on a certain level. As a result, during the course of the interviews for this study, they spoke of their experiences and how they believed that they addressed how much U.S. content to include in their courses.

In discussing their world history instruction, Thomas, Catherine and Trey all noted the importance of keeping separate world and U.S. history classes. Trey stated, "They should be two separate classes, [world and U.S. history]. I think that there should be a deep dive focus into U.S. history," noting that world history was not the place to delve into U.S. events (T. Lennon, personal interview, May 6, 2020). Thomas felt that the U.S. belonged in his world history instruction "If they didn't have U.S. as much... if they didn't have any U S history, and it was all

world history, I think I would incorporate it much more” (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 22, 2020). Thomas excluded the United States because his students had much more access to U.S. history than the world during their education. Catherine echoed Thomas’s insistence: “Because it's taught separately. Here's U.S. history, here's U.S. history, now it's World history” (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020). Whether it was because Trey felt U.S. history deserved a dedicated space or because Thomas and Catherine felt that world history needed one, these three participants, the more seasoned of the participants, centered these views in their instructional practices repeatedly.

Frequently citing the need to broaden student knowledge of other regions of the world, the participants made efforts to keep the United States in the background of their courses. During the interview focused on Cold War resources that I provided, Catherine remarked she felt my suggestions were too tied to the United States: “Well, [it does bother me] a little bit. You mentioned the Churchill Speech. I think it'd be good to have a Sterling speech. Maybe even, Ho Chi Minh, which exemplifies what Vietnam is feeling, especially during the Vietnam War” (C. Tudor, personal interview, May 7, 2020) Catherine directed her instruction away from the United States to the extent that she later mentioned that she might not use the Churchill Iron Curtain speech I included because it was delivered in Missouri. She felt she could find resources that did not have any direct connection to the United States for her classes. This comment suggested that Catherine was conscious of any referencing of the United States in her world courses, preferring to curtail any possible hint of the United States.

Both Catherine and Thomas expressed managing the amount of U.S. content, but were quick to point out that they lessened their focus on the United States, as opposed to avoiding it. Catherine explained that the balance that she tried to strike: “I don’t purposely avoid the U.S.. I



will include some, but it's not in their questions. It might be included in their notes. It's probably not going to be more than 1 slide out of 10, maybe" (C. Tudor, personal interview, April 14, 2020). She was mindful of her inclusion of the United States not just in her instruction but also her assessment of the content. Limiting the content did not necessarily mean that the United States was portrayed as separate from the rest of the world. Not assessing the U.S. content in connection to other regions within a unit might serve to set the United States apart though. Catherine's aim with her decision was to keep her students' focus on the rest of the world, but in doing so, she inadvertently distinguished the United States from the world and potentially gave students the idea that U.S. involvement was less important if not assessed.

Much like Catherine, Thomas emphasized limiting U.S. content. He clarified his approach as providing context:

The word avoiding versus, I feel I, minimize it more than I avoid it completely, which is I don't feel like I don't talk about the United States, but in U. S. history with World War I, the United States came in and soon the war was over. And in world history I'm like, everybody's kind of dead already. So, it's not as impressive as I claimed it was last year. I feel I minimize their impact as opposed to just ignoring it completely (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 16, 2020).

Thomas's example shows how he framed the United States differently between world and U.S. classes. His approach seems reasonable as one would expect more detail about U.S. involvement during a U.S. history course. Catherine echoed Thomas's coverage: " Purposely like in World War One, you leave out the U.S. because they don't really get involved until the end of the war. I

think I talked about it briefly, but we certainly don't emphasize its big role.” (C. Tudor, personal interview, February 28, 2020). Yet, in downplaying the impact of U.S. forces, Thomas and Catherine might be seen as emphasizing the ways in which the U.S. did not participate in world events and therefore, remained disengaged. This positioning of the United States could lead students to believe that the United States engagement was sudden or that the nation had not had allegiances prior to entry. Their teaching decisions could be interpreted by students as the U.S.’s actions were somehow indicative of the United States being unaffected by global affairs and validates Stearns’ (2008) concern that students would be unable to see existing connections.

Evelyn suggested both limiting the U.S. content and incorporating some. She agreed with Thomas that the details of U.S. engagement in World War I belonged in U.S. history: “I think with the [World] Wars, I would just kind of avoid... I would talk about how the United States got involved, but I would kind of avoid going in depth of the reasonings behind it and just say. One meant to be isolationist and then we came in” (T. McCririe, personal interview, April 15, 2020). Again, there was logic to not dwelling on the U.S. entry into World War I during a world history course, but Evelyn expressed avoidance. In avoiding the role that the United States played and then mentioning isolation, Evelyn separated the United States from other actors during this time. She did this even while saying repeatedly that the United States was an important part of world history in her eyes.

While their instructional decisions did not always match the practice of separating the United States and the world, the participants all insisted in some way that they should avoid the U.S. content during their courses. This underlying perception served to isolate the U.S. from its global actions and implied that the United States was not an active participant in the world. Even

though the participants positioned the United States in ways that showed global involvement, the participants consciously wanted to limit U.S. mentions in their courses.

### **Discussion**

This chapter centered on how the participants' instructional choices about the United States positioned the nation as part of world history and affairs. The four narratives that became apparent suggested that the United States was neither positioned in one way in each classroom or that the narratives about the U.S. were aligned. The narratives show the complexity of views and historical understanding that the participants held and how these choices reflect deeply held beliefs about the United States both as a nation and as a world actor. Some of these reflected how the participants integrated their cultural identity and influence they had learned about and how they reinforced these as part of their instruction.

A common thread among these approaches was to make the United States seem unique. To be unique is neither positive nor negative, but rather, in this case, that the United States was set upon its own path. It seems to emulate one of the purposes of national histories, to express the common bonds of a people and place (Bender, 2006). Even when framing content to show inequities of U.S. society or that the United States was an extension of European and Western thought, the participants offered a sense that the United States was distinctive. There was a promise that the United States would contribute something more, additional to society and the world. These aspirations could back to the fundamental purpose of teaching world history that each participant shared in the first findings chapter, for students to know their place in a broader global context. In this sentiment, one can see the aspirations of global citizenship that world history courses could afford (Girard & Harris, 2013). These hopeful narratives may be a way to show students what people living where they do have done in the world, but it does so by

privileging the nation in this case. These connections and ideals appeared to be more ingrained in the participants' identities and roles than global storylines.

The participants were also invoking Lipsett's (1997) call that the United States is premised on the ideas of liberty, equality and opportunity afforded specifically to her as a nation. They framed their U.S.-related content through an inherent privileging of the U.S. system. These ideas of how the United States has shaped the world through democratic principles and technological advancements were not unique to these participants. Their almost unintentional shaping of the U.S. seemed to be ingrained in them as individuals. Their views were part of how they taught their world history courses, but in ways they rarely considered. Holland et al. (1998) and Urrieta (2007b) framed this through the cultural piece of figured worlds. The world history identities that these teachers took up were steeped in the cultural traditions that surrounded them. These national histories were part of the influences they navigated in this role as world history educators.

In the past several years, invocations of American exceptionalism have become a normalized voice in U.S. society. The participants have read and countless heard statements like former Congressman Joe Scarborough's during the COVID crisis:

I believe in American exceptionalism and think those who don't must be so blinded by their own prejudices that they can't see the facts right in front of them. The United States' military might, and economic prowess remain unrivaled. America's cultural influence and soft power remain enormous, even with the most inward-looking president in over a century sitting in the White House.

While critical of the U.S. leadership, Scarborough's faith in American ideals seems a comparison for how the participants negotiated societal narratives that had been ingrained in their own educations. The participants mirrored this mainstream concern for current situations but future promise whether seeking to hold the United States accountable for its shortcomings as a nation, to recall past promises kept or to encourage others to further the mission. In the course of these interviews, it was apparent that these teachers questioned the present and historic U.S. position in the world and yet still were influenced by American ideals present in society. They reinforced the narratives above that implied the United States was an exemplar, a modern power and a unique force in the world. They may have questioned U.S. actions or status, but they drew on the sustained culture of which they as U.S. teachers are also part. Their classrooms may be sites of world history instruction, but they have constant reminders of where they teach as basic as the American flag that is displayed in the room. These United States "reminders" served as artifacts, routines, and material objects that underline the traditions and ideals they embody. The U.S. classrooms in which they teach implicitly framed a view and scope of world history instruction.

These U.S. habits and customs represented unshakable and often unconscious views of the world for the participants. Yet, it is important to note that these ingrained attitudes translated into the teaching the participants described above. In their concern for the endless logistical considerations and coverage decisions that teachers make, they rarely considered their gatekeeping of alternative content and views for their students. These teachers acted upon instilled, longstanding societal understandings of the United States, but did so at the cost of limiting alternative perspectives less prevalent in society.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS

Being in and of the world is the condition of modern history for all societies. Americans ought not be surprised, annoyed or angry when the “world” seems to “intrude” on their lives. The very notion of intrusion confuses the issue. The United States is not outside or apart from the common history of humanity, as some proponents of American exceptionalism would have us believe. (Bender, 2006)

In the final chapter of his book, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (2006), Bender urged U.S. citizens to see themselves and their nation as part of the world. Bender, a former President of the American Historical Association, has written extensively about the value of national histories and also the expense of not looking beyond one's national boundaries to see global connections. This study began out of concern that the United States was wholly missing from world history classes, creating a separation greater than even Bender's quote imagined. Yet, in the course of the study, it has become apparent that the United States was frequently present in the world history classes of my participants and still more often positioned as separately as the above quotation implied.

The goal of this study was to explore how the United States is included in world history classes. I wanted to understand not only the instructional decisions that the four participating world history teachers made, but also what ideas, individuals and materials influenced their choices. With this goal in mind, I also wanted to capture how the participants saw their roles and identities as world history teachers. At first, I described what considerations participants relied

on when planning their world history lessons, including their purpose of teaching world history, the impact of their own educational experiences, and their perceptions of the place of the United States in the curriculum. I then identified the communities and resources that regularly factored into their decisions. These two chapters helped to establish the underlying beliefs and voices that shaped the participants' instructional choices; they offered an appreciation into the intentions and criteria they used in their roles as instructional gatekeepers (Thornton, 2005). They also provided insights into their roles more broadly as world history teachers. In these two chapters, the participants explained and bounded the figured worlds that shaped their identities as world history teachers and guided their practices. Finally, in the last findings chapter, I examined instructional materials and descriptions that the participants offered to categorize the ways in which these teachers positioned the United States as part of their world history classes. In the rest of this chapter, I discuss how the instructional decisions of these teachers reflect their identities as world history teachers, provide insights into their roles as instructional gatekeepers, consider the implications of this study for the field of social studies education, and explore directions for future study based on my findings.

### **Roles and Identities**

Teachers assign value to content and activities every day. They may not, however, consider how these values reflect the identities and roles that they assume. In figured worlds, actions reveal one's identity, but this identity and the accompanying action is about much more than the current circumstance or situation. Individuals are "history-in-person", suggesting that self-making is done over time with built-in responses to experiences, cultural narratives and mediated power structures (Urrieta, 2007b). The participants in this study are far from exceptions to this idea. As world history teachers, they embody both professional narratives about the

framing of the subject and narratives of historical progress. Both of these reflect the education and experience of these teachers, all of which are rooted in American values and ideas of historical development assimilated over each individual's lifetime. However, the participants only acknowledged this rootedness in the culture when prompted to do so during this study, suggesting the implicitness of these storylines in their teaching.

World history is often viewed as the class that teaches students about the rest of the world, meaning that which is beyond the United States. The intention of the course is also to broaden students' views of the global society in which they live and will enter once they finish their schooling. This intention was a refrain frequently stated during this study. These courses may even represent places to foster dispositions of cosmopolitanism or global citizenship. These storylines about the purpose of world history courses are not prescriptive; teachers can shift or decide their own objectives for their classes. Yet, these common narratives about world history instruction can "be significant as backdrops for interpretation" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 54), meaning that teachers, texts, lessons can be evaluated against these "standards" of what world history looked like.

I would argue that the participants in this study expressed many of the above "storylines" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 54) as their conceptions of the world history courses they taught. Their identities as world history teachers and their perceptions of what their courses should accomplish were centered in understanding the world to be larger than their students' lived experiences. Yet, as the participants spoke about the ways in which they navigated their roles as world history teachers, it was clear that these backdrops represented traditions of historical study that had learned were part of covering world history content and curriculum. Their colleagues, textbooks and resources reinforced the idea that world history is the time to learn about countries and



regions other than the United States. With so many aspects of the participants' figured worlds suggesting that the United States was not part of the content of course, the participants responded initially by repeating these tropes. Their purposeful pursuit of these expectations seemed to be what drove their instruction and their conception of their place in this socially-constructed world.

Throughout the interviews, the participants shifted descriptions of their actions and adherence to these norms. They revealed to me and also to themselves the ways in which they had often framed their instruction through U.S.-related content. They seemed reticent to elaborate on how the United States became a consistent comparison for their other content. Their standards, resources and colleagues echoed that the United States was to remain on the periphery, and still, the participants drew on examples from American industrialization, embracing of Enlightenment ideas and global power after World War II. This suggested that some aspect of their socially constructed space exerted potentially greater influence on their teaching than they had recognized previously.

This reaction raises some challenges to the idea that individuals define and bound their figured world. Although these participants were drawing on American concepts and deeply embedded notions about world history specifically and history generally, they did so implicitly. I do not see this as a contradiction of how Holland et al. (1998) developed their ideas of figured worlds but rather that elements of individual identity may be so deeply held that they are employed but often unexamined or even assumed by the individual. An example of this relates to the United States as part of the world but not an emphasized aspect of world history curriculum. Each of the participants would have agreed with the above statement, and voiced this idea in early interviews, but only thought about the limitations of this view when asked.

## **The Cultural Pervasiveness of American Exceptionalism**

The goal was to teach the world outside the United States, but the teachers seemed to challenge their own stated intentions. What would explain this presence of the United States in their decision making and instruction? On the surface, the textbooks and resources that the teachers used and created aimed at global coverage. The State standards largely focused on other parts of the world as did their expressed conversations with colleagues. Yet, the United States was undeniably present and in ways that highlighted or challenged the nation for its innovations and ideals about government and democracy. Studies have shown the Western leanings (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010; Girard & Harris, 2012; Bain & Schreiner, 2005; Mead, 2006) of world history curriculum and textbooks. Therefore, it is not hard to imagine that resources and colleagues using the resources also quietly reinforced the Western and U.S. perspectives that teachers had also been educated in.

I suspect this speaks to the pervasiveness of American exceptionalism in the nation's culture. American exceptionalism, even contested, underlies many conversations about the United States. Dan Zak's July 2020 op-ed headline "American exceptionalism is our preexisting condition" is a prime example of how this ideology has been invoked regularly to critique the perceived U.S. perch atop of the global mountain. Even while being critical of U.S. inaction about racial inequities and pandemic mismanagement, Zak and hosts of others used the notion of U.S. superiority and character to frame their argument. Similarly, for all the ways that the participants wanted to broaden their students' worldviews, this ubiquitous narrative persisted in their instructional decisions. This "special character" (Lipsett, 1997) of the United States was so inherently privileged in their own lives and educations, that they continued to reinforce the status of the argument. Part of the idea of cultural means in figured worlds relies on Hallowell's (1955)

contention that individuals inhabit culturally-defined worlds and position themselves in connection to them. With this in mind, the participants in this study, and teachers generally, do not operate in a vacuum from the rest of the society. The participants have the ability to act agentically (Holland et. al, 1998) and push against these ideas of American exceptionalism or other narratives. Yet, I found in the course of these interviews that the participants had focused on coverage in the curriculum, emphasizing the day-to-day concerns of their practice without time and space to reflect on the cultural inheritance of U.S. ideals and character.

Guarneri and Davis (2008) said it was part of a mission of social studies, particularly civics and U.S. history teachers to convey the specialness of the American democracy and history. Social studies and history teachers, like mathematics teachers, may have more knowledge of some subjects, but they are not certified in one area of history or another. They are generalists. In this way, I believe that Guarneri and Davis (2008) could mean all U.S.-educated history teachers. They are all steeped in the master narratives of U.S. history and if they are products of U.S. schools, they have been introduced to the democratic values believed central to the nation. They, moreover, have been told in some capacity that one of their purposes as social studies teachers is to foster ideas of citizenship in their students (Fenton, 1967). This infusion of citizenship education into all social studies education is not without merits, but teachers need to be intentional in how those democratic values are applied.

The world history teachers in this study spoke of how they approached world history differently than the other courses. They still considered historical thinking skills, how to make content manageable and what their students needed to know. But, they also thought of themselves as purposefully broadening their students' views beyond American values and ideas-- to see the greater world. This in many ways defined their identity as world history teachers, and

yet the presence of the United States in their courses was palpable. They frequently positioned the nation as having a unique and powerful character that other nations could emulate. One could easily argue that this is simply a form of cognitive dissonance in that the participants have an entrenched view of the world that they implicitly and explicitly apply in their classrooms (Tavris & Aronson, 2007). In essence, the teachers reinforced the values that they were trying to help their students to see beyond. They do so not out of a desire to inculcate students with a particular vision of the United States, but because they may not recognize how deeply embedded American exceptionalism has been in their own education and lives. Moreover, this reflects how these cultural storylines impacted their navigation of their roles and identities as world history teachers. The experiences of the individual participants framed the very notion of what constituted the “world” in world history and likely would be different if the participants were not from or educated in the United States or if this study were to take place in another nation.

### **Gatekeeping**

Teachers, all teachers, make choices about what to include in their courses that will help their students make sense of content. This instructional gatekeeping, as Thornton (1991, 2005) called it, is unavoidable. As gatekeepers, teachers do need to be conscious of the decisions they make and the possible consequences. They need to consider if the criteria they are using, the content they choose, and the strategies they employ are aligned with their educational goals for a course (Thornton, 2005). The teachers in this project had stated goals for their world history classes, the preparation of students for the global society they would enter.

Each of the participants shared this goal. They tried to make sure that their content represented most regions of the world and that students could connect this knowledge to their lives. These are perfectly noble goals. They also align with practices that researchers like Barton

and Patricia Avery (2016) advocate as part of effective social studies teaching. These well-articulated aims of these teachers seemed to translate into a confirmable vision of content as well. Some participants were quite conscious of leaving out Latin America or not centering African history enough in their courses. Again, these are valid concerns and imply that teachers are conscious of the role of gatekeeper in world history as it applies to *other* parts of the world. Teachers may not be as conscious or explicit in thinking about how the United States fits into these instructional choices. Interestingly, this did not turn out to be an issue of complete removal of the United States, as I anticipated it might be, but rather of positioning of the United States when included or consciously downplayed. The positioning of the United States as a constant comparison to other nations and situations or as unique to the experience of others limited how the students understood the U.S. relationship with world events. By centering other nations, teachers sought to emphasize the events happening elsewhere but often relied on the United States as a normalizing comparison. When the United States is placed as a way to gauge the successes and failures of another nation or region, I would argue that the United States is a proverbial yardstick by which all others are measured. Gatekeeping is a process of choosing not just what content students have access to, but the viewpoints are being used to shape that content. As teachers limit where and how the United States enters into their world history classes, they also send messages, possibly more forcefully than intended, that can prioritize United States beliefs, concepts of government and decisions above others as opposed to in conversation with them.

The embeddedness of this perspective circles back to the roles that these teachers are fulfilling in their world history classes. Even in the assumption that the world history course offers a year-long opportunity to learn about everyone else, U.S. world history teachers are

sending (probably because they were also sent) the message that there is a natural separation between national and international content. In other words, U.S. world history teachers reinforce the same disciplinary boundaries and ideas that they were also taught. This artificial, discipline-created and culturally reinforced notion of historical study draws not just on gatekeeping but also on broader cultural forces manifest in the actions of each teacher. Inevitably, the combination of gatekeeping and the participants' identities proved significant in their choices, often without their purposeful reflection.

### **A Decolonial Perspective**

Is it realistic to expect teachers born, educated and teaching in the United States to have a perspective other than one grounded in the nation's history, beliefs and ideas? U.S. teachers are largely educated from a Western perspective. This is not just about the copious amounts of Western history they are taught, but rather the way their knowledge has been shaped. It is not enough to "add" information about the Global South or other regions of the world outside of Europe and North America to the curriculum. The participants alluded to coverage of content about other regions of the world as their goal for the course. In speaking of global political revolutions or imperialism or even the Cold War, the teachers wanted to downplay the United States involvement to include others like the Haitian Revolution or the land grab in Africa or the Opium Wars in China. Adding content and checking for coverage of regions other than the West though is a tangible way to verify the inclusive nature of a world history course. In doing this, world history teachers widen their maps, but not necessarily the perspective.

Decoloniality work demands more though. In adding events and decisions that impact colonized populations, teachers likely are still presenting those events from the view of their own cultural traditions. To this point, in her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Ariella

Aïsha Azoulay (2019) stresses that imperialism and colonialism must be unlearned. Azoulay likens colonial structures and its impacts to photography. A picture may seem to accurately show moments, but it is still through a lens, a lens that reinforces and replays colonial violence. Also, one that takes on the perspective of the photographer. In classrooms, teachers are often the photographers who frame what ends up in the picture. What does this mean for the world history teachers? Adding content is not enough. And, unlearning historical narratives while grappling with a curriculum so vast may be unfathomable for most teachers.

Countless decolonial scholars (Spivak, 2003, Prakash, 1994, Chakrabarty, 2008) all suggest that adding more details is not the same as shifting perspectives. They do not all agree on how or if world history teachers might do more than remove their lens by adding a new one. This is the challenge for western world history teachers in thinking about how to recenter their courses. For the many complications of rethinking one's approach to world history, decolonial theories do represent an alternative even if formidable challenge to the teaching of school history—both history in general and world history in particular (Cairns, 2020; Dozono, 2020; Conrad, 2019; Kim et al.; 2013)--one that reminds teachers to consider how they position both the colonized and colonizers. The teachers in this study did at times include content that framed the United States as complicit in settler colonialism or failing to achieve its democratic ideals at home. They did not infer that these were more than ways to compare the United States to other situations or have students make those connections to their own experiences. In most instances of their decision making, teachers generally framed the United States positively in their role in the world.

While not a substitute for infusing decolonial perspectives, global history and global education provide a starting point. Global studies focuses on trends and broader connections

between history, civics, and geography (Gaudelli, 2014). This shift away from disciplinary thinking does not solve issues of embedded cultural narratives that teachers carry but does center the interconnectedness of the world and more global perspectives (Merryfield & Subedi, 2006). As Thomas's approach might imply, a more thematic framing of the course could allow the United States to be in conversation with other nations on topics of great relevance such as climate change that are often sidelined in world history courses. Again, the employing of global studies, global education or global history does not replace the need to broaden perspectives but does begin to shift how teachers center instruction.

### **Implications**

This study contributes to research in social studies education by examining how deeply embedded cultural narratives may impact instructional decision making. By doing so, this study has implications for social studies and teacher education while pointing to opportunities for further research.

In this case, I explore these ideas through world history classes. As Tamara Shreiner and David Zwart (2020) noted, world history has become a common part of secondary education in the United States. They, moreover, state that students need to reach across national boundaries to understand events across time. While this study is focused on how national boundaries in the form of dominant cultural narratives are present in U.S. world history classes, it also suggests that examining the impact of those U.S.-centered narratives is needed to break through them. The findings in this study are not meant to suggest that teachers should not include the United States in world history classes or even ignore the American exceptionalist ideas. Alexander Fancher (2020) wrote that the way to approach contentious political beliefs in classrooms is to have more conversations aimed at building tolerance. It seems fair to suggest that a way to think through the



implicit national ideas that teachers and students hold is to examine them more openly. While I do not suggest incorporating more ideas of American exceptionalism into world history classes, teachers and students should challenge and discuss those that are present.

The unexamined positioning of the United States in social studies courses and conversation exists beyond high school world history. Scholars have pointed to concerns in U.S. history courses or standards regarding master narratives about racial progress and or omission of content concerning indigenous populations. For example, Maribel Santiago and Eliana Castro (2019) encouraged teachers to consider historical inquiry about Latinx communities as a path to a more nuanced, complex understanding of the racial and ethnic context of the United States. Others have focused on content standards that marginalize the voices of Black or Indigenous peoples (Shear et al., 2015; Busey & Walker, 2017). What is clear through all of these studies is that the question of including the United States in world history or any social studies class is not just about whether the United States is presented but how. In this way, all social studies teachers and teacher preparation courses need to consider how curriculum and teacher decision making build on certain aspects of U.S. culture through curriculum as well as student experience. Again, this is not only a high school social studies issue, but an elementary school issue, too (Busey & Walker, 2017). While standards and curriculum work is needed, teacher educators also need to raise awareness and offer alternative perspectives to pre-service teachers.

This study also leaves room for examining the positioning of the United States in classroom instruction and conversation. Although classroom observations were originally part of this research, this did not occur due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The opportunity to observe how teachers' instructional practices reflect their decision making represents a logical next step. Additionally, teacher decisions impact the information that students have access to (Thornton,

1991), but is also not the same as how students receive the messages that teachers deliver.

Therefore, student interviews and work would enhance what we know about the impact of teachers' instructional practices and delivery.

Even without observing teachers in their classrooms, I believe this study has implications for world history classrooms and practices. Why do so many world history teachers, including the ones in this study, suggest that the United States should be “avoided” in world history content? How should teachers connect content to their students thoughtfully? These are far from easy to solve questions. World history classes should neither position the United States as having no role or consider personal experience the only way to draw on national history. Instead, world history curriculum and teachers might embrace a more global approach as previously discussed, and one that acknowledges that the United States has multiple narratives and perspectives. Moreover, to me, this implies infusing more geography, economics and civics content and embracing the notion of social studies as a multi-disciplinary subject. Thematic approaches make sense in this way to not only cross time and space but raise issues of climate change, discrimination or gender equality. There are models for this such as Thomas's work in this study or Rosalie Metro's (2020) book that highlights potential themes. Teachers and students would benefit from the use of broader thematic approaches that would enable the United States to be used in conversation with other nations.

Although I conducted this study among practicing teachers with a range of experience, the findings suggest that possible changes would be appropriate to consider in relation to the training of teacher candidates. There are many stakeholders who participate in the preparation of social studies teachers. Methods instructors and content specialists such as historians represent just a couple of the faculty members who influence what pre-service teachers learn about

education. In this mix of people shaping their understanding of teaching, pre-service teachers may not be shown how to think about teaching in a global context, let alone thinking about decolonial and even national lenses critically. Vanessa Andreotti (2010), addressing the rise in global citizenship education, urged teacher educators to “raise their professional game” (p.233) and to add more lenses to approaching globalization. This is no less true in world history education specifically and social studies generally. Social studies teacher educators share a responsibility with historians and other professionals who participate in the training of teachers to go beyond strategies to challenge their students to consider the deeper narratives that impact their teaching. There is already a necessary movement to do this with race, ethnicity and orientation with future teachers, but there needs to be more discussion and activity on national and global identities as well.

### **Conclusion**

This study focused on how teachers thought about and made instructional decisions about incorporating the United States into world history classes. The significance of the study lies not in the fact that the teachers did regularly include U.S. content and examples in their teaching. Nor is it that they initially implied that they did their best not to do so. Rather that even in their attempts to decenter the United States, its consistent presence in their decision making and instructional choices suggest the impact of the idea of national exceptionalism and potentially other broad societal narratives.

The intention of this study was never to argue whether the United States is or has the potential to be exceptional. That will be left to historians and pundits. Instead, it was to highlight the ways in which world history teachers position the United States as part of the world. It is apparent from this study that teachers need the opportunity to consider the perceptions they give.

This is true in all courses but is no truer than in one that is about other perspectives and regions. This represents a purpose to which all of the participants subscribed. Generally, teachers need to be conscious of the perceptions framing their teaching and how those reinforce, challenge or complicate the messages that students receive elsewhere. But teachers, preservice and inservice, need to be given the opportunity and possibly guidance to explore these narratives as well as those not traditionally included in world history curriculum.

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **First Interview Protocol**

In this initial interview, I asked the participants general questions about world history, their teaching practices and background. These interviews were conducted prior to school shutdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. Where did you receive your teacher preparation?
3. What history classes did you take while you were studying to be a teacher?
4. How many years have you been teaching world history?
5. How do you decide/select specific content for a unit?
6. What are your goals for student learning in your world history class?
7. How do you think about including different areas of the world broadly? The United States specifically? From where and how do you think these ideas developed?
8. How do you determine how long a unit will be? Or what themes or regions you include?
9. How much freedom do you feel you have to teach subjects that you want within world history? What factors shape the extent of freedom that you feel?
10. What influences your views and practices as a world history teacher? Is this different from other social studies subjects that you teach?

## APPENDIX B

### Second Interview Protocol

In this interview, I asked the participants to explain their understanding of a selected part of the State standards (Era 6) and how the U.S. might be included. I will give the teachers a set of possible events that are implied through the standards and ask teachers to prioritize how they think about and teach them.

1. How do you envision the U.S. as part of world history (follow up with a question about the modern impact of the US in the world)? Think about us as part of bigger structure...
2. Given the following topics, will you prioritize what you would teach?
  - American Revolution
  - Constitutionalism
  - Communism and socialism
  - Enlightenment ideas
  - French Revolution
  - Haitian Revolution
  - Mexican Revolution
  - Republicanism
  - Secularization
3. What influenced the decisions you made? How much time do the topics at the top of your list usually receive in your lessons?
4. How do you use the American Revolution (6.2.1) in this part of the course? If not, why not? If so, why? Are there particular ideas you want the students to know about the American Revolution in relation to the others that you teach?
5. How much freedom do you feel you have to teach subjects that you want within world history?
6. How do the state standards influence your teaching of world history? (This is a variation on questions asked during the 1st interview)
7. Where and how do you get your information on what you should teach the state standards? What influences what you emphasize from the standards?
8. How do you think the world history standards changed under the latest revisions? How do you see this impacting your teaching?
9. I have chosen to focus on Era 6 for both of the next 2 interviews. We will focus on 6.1 through 6.2.1. Would you please look them over and explain to me what these mean to you. What types of topics that you teach already do they equate to? Is there anything new for you that you don't teach or aren't sure about teaching?

## APPENDIX C

### Third Interview Protocol

In the third interview, I asked teachers to bring some materials they used to teach the Industrial Revolution and Imperialism. I asked the teachers to explain how they developed the lessons or unit, what they included, what they left out and what factored into their decisions.

1. How do you see the U.S. as part of the Industrial Revolution and Imperialism?
2. I asked you to bring lessons, materials, activities related to the Industrial Revolution and Imperialism in your WH classes. Will you explain them to me and introduce what you “brought”?
3. Where did you find the resources you used for these activities? What drew you to these?
4. Are there topics you feel are expected for you to teach in this unit? How is that expectation set? What consequences would there be if you didn’t teach that topic/those topics?
5. How do these fit into the new standards? 6.2.3 and 4 Era 6. (note: ask about the United States’ absence)
6. How do you choose the places you choose to study with these topics? Does the US come up in these conversations? How might you use the US for comparison?
7. Are there ways in which you intend to or purposely avoid teaching views of the U.S. in your world history courses? Why do you make those choices? How do you see these topics in U.S. history comparing or contrasting to them in the context of world history?
8. What influences your content selection for world history classes in topics that students will learn about in multiple history courses? (If appropriate, are these the same influences as other courses you teach)



## APPENDIX D

### Fourth Interview Protocol

Before the fourth interview, I sent the teachers resources to look at dealing with the Cold War; a short video about non-aligned nations, a political cartoon about the “Iron Curtain”, The Truman Doctrine, and a Smithsonian Folkways Music of the Cold War Playlist. I began the fourth interview with some follow-up questions that were specific to the participants’ previous answers. I then asked them the following questions to explore not only these resources, but what other considerations the teacher might have had in planning Cold War instruction.

1. What are the topics and events that you would want to cover in this? Are there particular resources that come to mind?
2. I want to give you 3 resources to consider...will you look at them and tell me what you would highlight in them or why you would choose not to use these resources?
3. In the last 2 interviews, we’ve looked at standards and topics suggested for them in Era 6. In this last interview, I want to explore your thoughts and priorities in Era 7. Era 7 covers from 1900 to the present. What is your experience in teaching this material previously? We are going to focus on 7.2.4 The Cold War:  
It says: 7.2.4 Cold War Conflicts – analyze the causes and consequences of major Cold War conflicts, including the global reconfigurations and restructuring of political and economic relationships in the post-World War II era.  
Examples may include but are not limited to: investigating economic, political, and military origins of the Cold War; arms race and space race; comparing and contrasting conflicts in Asia, Africa, and Central America; the significance of the Cold War as a 20th century event, including transitions from bipolar to multipolar center(s) of power.
4. The standards don’t specifically mention the U.S....Are there ways in which you would downplay the U.S. in the Cold War because of that? How might you want to make sure you include the U.S.?
5. Are there ways in which you intend to or purposely avoid teaching views of the United States in your world history courses? Why do you make those choices?
6. In thinking through our interviews and conversations, are there ways in which you would rethink any of your lessons in considering the inclusion or exclusion of the U.S.? Do you see the U.S. as present in your world history class even when you don’t focus on it? Why do you feel this way?
7. If you were designing a history curriculum, would you keep the separations between the US and the world...how would you construct the curriculum?
8. Do you see it as a problem to include the US in world history? Why or why not?
9. Do you see it as a problem to exclude the US in world history? Why or why not?
10. Throughout these interviews, you have identified the following influences on your teaching...Which do you think is the most important?
11. Do you identify as a world history teacher? History teacher? Social studies teacher? Why?

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