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YES, YOU CAN TEACH ABOUT RACISM IN OKLAHOMA:

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS TEACH ABOUT RACISM

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YES, YOU CAN TEACH ABOUT RACISM IN OKLAHOMA:

HOW SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS TEACH ABOUT RACISM

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Cathie and Jeff, who passed away in December of 2023. It is impossible for me to come to terms with their loss, and I know that they would be immensely proud of this achievement. This work is for them.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores how social studies educators in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area teach about racism in a politically conservative state climate. The purpose of the research was to understand the instructional strategies, methods, and decision-making processes teachers use to address racism in their classrooms despite restrictive legislation such as Oklahoma House Bills 1775 and 1038. Using a basic qualitative design, data were collected through pre-screening surveys and semi-structured interviews with five secondary-level social studies teachers from both public and parochial schools. Analysis of the interviews revealed three primary findings: (1) teachers employ diverse strategies and practices—most notably student-centered discussions, the use of primary sources, and reflective activities—to facilitate learning about racism; (2) educators consistently align their instruction with state standards and curriculum frameworks to safeguard against political and administrative scrutiny; and (3) the current political climate generates considerable fear, anxiety, and self-censorship among teachers, particularly those in public schools. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated professional commitment to fostering racial literacy, critical thinking, and civic engagement among their students. This study contributes to the limited body of research on racism education in conservative states and underscores the resilience and adaptability of teachers who seek to provide accurate, inclusive historical instruction within restrictive environments. Recommendations include sustained professional development, administrative support, and continued advocacy for teachers' pedagogical freedom to address racism responsibly and effectively.

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Introduction

While education about race and racism can be integrated into many subjects, the topics are frequently addressed in the social studies classroom and particularly through the study of history. There is an abundance of definitions for racism depending on the organization or person defining it. However, for the purposes for my research, I will be using the description created by Cole (2019) which states that

> Racism refers to a variety of practices, beliefs, social relations, and phenomena that work to reproduce a racial hierarchy and social structure that yield superiority, power, and privilege for some, and discrimination and oppression for others. (para. 1)

Prejudice, discrimination, and racial supremacy are common themes throughout World History and are especially essential to the understanding of United States History (Nelson & Pang, 2006). According to LaGarrett King (2022), teaching about race and racism is an integral part of the educative process and there is no place more appropriate to teach about them than social studies. His reason for this is rooted in the origins of social studies as a subject: racism was a reason for the founding of the field; it was not meant to transform or educate society, but to sustain a racist society's belief in classifying human beings based on skin color. Students have historically been taught to be racially illiterate through curricula, strategies, and popular pedagogies. Racism is still a major issue when determining inequity in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and it is important to teach in social studies classrooms because it provides a complete story of society's development throughout history and can assist students in developing solutions to racism and other related social problems. By talking about race and racism, it strengthens students' analytical skills relevant to social studies education such as historical thinking and critical inquiry (National Council for the Social Studies

[NCSS], 2023). Additionally, learning about race and racism is essential to maintaining a healthy democracy as it encourages students to work through and across differences which is a hallmark of a democratic society.

The seemingly unlimited access to information via social media and the 24-hour news cycle makes the students of today more likely to engage with the information and become more knowledgeable about racial issues and racially motivated current events. To students, racism is no longer an abstract concept consigned to remain on the pages of a history textbook; it is a very real thing that they can witness live on their cell phones (Castro et al., 2015). For instance, the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was caught on video camera by a 17-year-old witness named Darnella Frazier, who posted it to her Instagram account in the early hours of May 26, 2020 (Alexander, 2020). Eventually, the police body camera footage from the officers who were on the scene of Floyd's arrest and death were released to the public three months later. The ensuing worldwide Black Lives Matter protests, as well as the court cases of Chauvin and his co-officers, were widely distributed on news media webpages and social media apps like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Floyd's case was seemingly another in a long string of similar cases, where African Americans were unjustly killed by police officers for alleged minor offenses: for example, Sandra Bland and Alton Sterling in 2015, Philando Castile in 2016, and Breonna Taylor in 2020. All of these cases were caught on camera - whether by eyewitnesses or police body camera footage - and were available to people worldwide within minutes of occurring. This is the situation in which today's students find themselves: a constant stream of news and world events sent right to their cell phones and other devices and to the apps

on which they spend the majority of their free time. Not only that, but they are also engaging in these events in real time, reposting information from others' accounts, attending protests and rallies, and posting about their own experiences on their social media accounts for others to see. It is as Castro et al. said: for students today, racism is very real and lived every day.

Politicians have driven parents into a fervor about race in education and have launched what seems like a crusade to eliminate critical race theory (CRT) from elementary and secondary schools, even though CRT is a concept taught at the collegiate level. It has become common for people, particularly opponents of CRT, to conflate it with teaching about racism in any way. In some US states, such as Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee, officials have implemented curricula that allow teachers to teach about race and racism; however, they must be extremely cautious that they do not make students feel bad or uncomfortable about the topics or the teachers may face legal repercussions (Kim, 2021). The public has become increasingly more divided on the issue of a school's responsibility to teach about racism and how to do so. A national study of 1,200 adults performed in 2023 by the McCourtney Institute for Democracy at Penn State University revealed that just over half of the people survey agreed that their opinion lies between two statements:

- Schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students learn about the history of slavery and racism in the United States but should not teach about race relations today (41% of respondents).
- Schools do not have a responsibility to ensure that all students learn about the history of slavery and racism in the United States (10% of respondents). (p. 1-2)

Furthermore, the participants of the poll indicated that Americans are most supportive of having some influence over how slavery and racism are taught in public schools

followed by teachers themselves. They also believe that governors and state legislators should have little or no influence in how these topics are taught (McCourtney Institute, 2023).

If schools do not teach about race and racism, it creates a false and/or incomplete narrative of history and promulgates misinformation, to which children are particularly vulnerable. It is imperative that students learn about racism as it relates to equity and social justice so they may be successfully equipped to participate in our increasingly global and multicultural society (“Teaching about racism”, 2022). Additionally, race and racism must be a focus of education in order to understand how our racialized history as human beings made possible the racial realities of today; students must also learn about them so they can challenge internalized racism in which we all engage (NCSS, 2023).

Positionality

I am a white, middle-aged high school history teacher with over 15 years of experience teaching in public and parochial schools in the Oklahoma City metro area. Twelve of those years have been spent teaching a variety of social studies topics including ancient history, geography, United States history, and world history in various grades at the secondary level. My students during the last 12 years were mostly of Latino, Black, and Asian heritage; these students and their families have had to endure a time in this country where instances of racism and people expressing racist beliefs has ratcheted up significantly, whether it was because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, or increased threats of deportations following the 2024 election. During this time, I have honed my skills not only to teach about social studies

and history in general, but to specifically teach about racism in a state that has passed legislation that strictly controls how students engage with the topic.

The Oklahoma state superintendent passed restrictions on what books can appear in school and teacher libraries and required that the books be reviewed by school districts and removed if they did not appear on the right review lists. The state has passed Oklahoma House Bill 1038 in 2021, which prevents the use of critical race theory (CRT) in secondary classrooms as well as the 1619 Project, which promotes a critical viewpoint of the United States' Founding Fathers, the American Revolution, Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War (H. B. 1038, Silverstein, 2021). Additionally, Oklahoma House Bill 1775, passed in 2021, restricts the instruction of topics that may affect the psychological well-being of Oklahoma students and restricts the teacher's ability to teach about institutional and systemic racism.

My positionality is essential to understand in the context of this study because if teachers are restricted in how they can address racism in their classrooms, what then, does it really look like to learn about racism in Oklahoma classrooms? With these wonderings in mind, my research questions for the study include

1. What strategies, methods, and practices do Oklahoma City metro-area high school social studies teachers use to teach about racism?
2. What does the decision-making process look like for these teachers when they determine how to teach about racism in their classrooms?

Literature Review

When I began my search for relevant literature, I searched for scholarly work that dealt with how Social Studies teachers taught about racism. This cast an extremely wide net, and my results were not as fruitful as I had hoped. I then began narrowing my search and looked for strategies, methods, and practices that social studies teacher utilized to teach about race and racism in their classrooms. Since my research focused on the work of secondary social Studies teachers, I had to eliminate many resources that dealt with teaching about racism in elementary schools and in other subject areas such as mathematics, science, world languages, and language arts. When I performed my searches, I did not specifically consider geographical location as a search criterion, although I was able to find some literature that looked at racism education in what could be considered “politically conservative” states such as Tennessee, Texas, and Florida. Extant studies that I was able to find covered teacher methods and strategies about race and racism education in a broad sense, such as using discussion, engaging in culturally sustaining practices, and analyzing primary documents. Additionally, I was unable to find any studies that specifically investigated what teaching about racism looks like in the state of Oklahoma, which was the setting of my own research.

With my research questions in mind, I explored empirical articles and practitioner pieces that help me understand the potential purposes and approaches to instructing about race and racism in classrooms. Referential to my work is a study by Martell and Stevens (2017) which consisted of 10 case studies that examined how social studies teachers made race and racism explicit in their classrooms based on their belief of either tolerance-oriented or equity-oriented race education; why some teachers take a

CRT focus and some do not. Additionally, the works of Goodlad (1979) and Schmidt et al. (1996) both highlight the factors that go into the decision-making process for teachers: factors such as values and ethical considerations, teacher beliefs, funds of knowledge, learner needs and interests, and conventional wisdom. In the following section, I describe two themes of existing literature: strategies, methods, and practices utilized in the classroom by teachers, and the decision-making processes that teachers engage in when deciding not only the topics to teach about but also how to teach about them.

Strategies, Methods, and Practices

I am situating instructional strategies, methods, and practices independent of each other. I have found that the difference between instructional strategies, methods, and practices depends largely on the context in which they are used. Strategies refer to the broad plan that teachers adopt when considering how to teach about a topic, methods generally refer to a structured approach to classroom activities, and practices are the specific activities that happen in the everyday classroom. For instance, when a teacher decides to use discussion in their classroom to teach about racism, they may ask themselves the following questions: is it an overarching part of a broad plan to assist students in developing their critical thinking skills? Is it a structured approach to engaging with a particular topic? Or is it an activity used in the everyday classroom that takes the form of open-ended questions? While these questions are or can be generally applied, for the purpose of this study, these questions are particularly important as exploration of racism is the core content.

Discussion as a Primary Method to Teach About Racism

The use of discussion as an instructional method when teaching about racism features large in the existing literature. However, it is usually used in conjunction with other strategies, methods, and practices depending on the objective of the unit, lesson, or activity or the teacher's goal of the classroom. An article by Washington and Humphries (2011) investigated a teacher's use of discussion to teach about racism in a predominantly white and rural high school; additionally, Chandler (2010) suggested using multiple forms of discussion - Socratic and "fishbowl" discussions - to teach about Native American history. Brown and Brown (2011) studied how middle school teachers used textbooks as a jumping-off point for discussions as well as using other supplemental materials like fiction books, newspapers, and other print media. Castro et al. (2015) observed that discussions and conversations were frequently used in a high school class about race, gender, and ethnicity.

Discussions were also framed as "conversations" between students and also between students and teachers; a study by Bolgatz (2005) examined how two co-teachers addressed issues about race and racism in their classroom using conversations that encouraged student participation and ownership, formed a respectful atmosphere, and created a high amount of student-to-student interaction in listening, sharing, questioning, and discussion. These conversations were often facilitated by the co-teachers themselves discussing and sharing their personal experiences with racism.

Instructional Strategies and Practices Used to Teach About Racism

In addition to using discussion as an instructional method, several strategies and practices are utilized by teachers to teach about racism. Chandler (2010) made suggestions on how to use CRT to teach about United States history and advocated that US history be taught from a race-based perspective. Martell and Stevens (2019) investigated ten social studies teachers and how they integrated culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in their classrooms. The teachers all used CSP in their classrooms that were categorized in three ways: exchanging, where the teachers acted as facilitators of discussion about cultural differences and social inequity; discovering, where the students were exposed to many different racial and ethnic perspectives as a way to make historical and present-day interpretations; and challenging, where the teachers helped students develop their analysis skills to question the world around them. A study by Epstein et al. (2011) examined a teacher's use of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in an urban, mostly African American high school; their findings demonstrated that when CRP was used over the course of the school year, students engaged with content about racism in deeper and more complex ways regarding diversity of groups, agency, and dehumanization.

Furthermore, Pang and Valle (2004) examined how teachers used interdisciplinary content and perspectives to reshape the discussion of race and racism in social studies classrooms; more specifically, they looked at how teachers had their students look at scientific data such as genetics to refute the divisions that early science had created in the 1700s when it began placing social value on certain racial characteristics. As previously mentioned, Castro et al. (2015) observed discussions

being used to teach about racism, but they also saw that these discussions were used in conjunction to such activities as daily reflective journals, the regular use of racial dialogue and vocabulary, and the facilitation of the establishment of the students' own racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

Decision-Making Processes

The work by Girard et al. (2020) documented an idea that is already well-known: the teacher pedagogical and content decision-making process is incredibly complex. Factors that can influence decisions include significance of the historical events and developments, student interest, and relevance to the curriculum. As previously stated, this aligns with the findings of Goodlad (1979) and Schmidt et al. (1996) in that there are many factors that teachers consider when making decisions about content and pedagogical approaches. The current literature confirms and builds on these conclusions, introducing how teacher beliefs, values, and understandings as well as emotions - both of the teacher and student - can influence the decision-making process.

Teacher Beliefs and Actions

The work of Washington and Humphries (2011) determined that a teacher used her point of view, values, and experiences to decide how to address racism in her classroom. Additionally, Martell and Stevens (2017) examined how social studies teachers made race and racism explicit in their classrooms based on their belief of either tolerance-oriented or equity-oriented race education and why some teachers take a CRT focus, and some do not. Wills (2019) similarly examined how teachers' understanding of race and racism influenced their use of curricular materials and how the content, focus, and framing shaped the inclusion and representation of those topics

in the United States history curriculum of their classrooms. Thornton (1989) characterized social studies teachers as gatekeepers for curriculum and instruction who base their decision-making process on their own frames of reference; what is outlined in the curriculum is not what is taught in classrooms. Lastly, Schmidt et al. (1996) determined that there are a wide variety of factors that influence the decision-making process and thus direct the teachers' choices of strategy, practice, and activities. These factors include the intended intentions, aims, and goals of a lesson as well as the topic or conceptual complexity, the students' developmental complexity, and the cognitive complexity required to complete the task.

Lived Experiences

Castro et al. (2015) found that teachers addressed topics about race and racism in class because of their relevance to students in terms of current events. This established a culture of trust, communication, and patience as a way to create a safe place to hold difficult conversations. This also built strong relationships between the teachers and their students which enabled the teachers to address their own attitudes and opinions regarding racism education. The study by Martell and Stevens (2019) showed that teachers' approaches to using culturally sustaining pedagogy was determined by the school contexts and students' backgrounds. As cited previously, Girard et al. (2020) discovered factors influencing secondary history teachers' content choices were complex and included historical significance, student interest, and relevance. A dissertation by Villarreal (2019) examined the key curricular and pedagogical features of three secondary social studies teachers who centered issues of race and racism in their classrooms - their decision-making processes and the impact of

relevant lived experiences. Villareal observed three extremely nuanced approaches to teaching about race and racism that allowed students to deeply engage with the topic, made connections between past and present, and enabled their students to discuss current events with which they were familiar.

Emotions

While teacher beliefs and actions as well as lived experiences play major roles in the decision-making process, emotions have a role to play as well, and usually in conjunction with other considerations. Sheppard and Levy (2018) determined that the teacher decision-making was based on both their emotions and students' emotions during the planning and teaching process. The study also discovered that teachers prioritized the creation of safe spaces for students to learn, which entailed considering student identities and how their identities interact with course content. To build upon that, Zembylas (2007) found that to teach well, teachers must be able to connect their emotional understanding with what they know about subject matter, pedagogy, school discourses, personal histories, and curriculum. Teacher knowledge is larger than just individual teachers; it involves the social and political contexts of teaching and learning.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature I was able to gather that addressed teaching about racism in social studies classrooms approached it with what I consider to be a broad lens. A few types of discussions were revealed to be used when teachers taught about racism in their classrooms, and those discussion were frequently accompanied by other instructional strategies, methods, and practices. Several articles focused on the frameworks that social studies teachers used to teach about racism, such as critical race theory,

culturally sustaining practices, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Lastly, the research indicates that much goes into teacher decision-making when planning and executing lessons: teacher beliefs and actions, the lived experiences of both teachers and students, and teacher emotions around particular topics. However, existing research has shown a shortage of information about this subject in terms of what actual instruction on race and racism looks like in the classroom, and this is where the gap in the research lies. For instance, different types of discussion and conversations were mentioned in several sources, and that they were used in conjunction with other activities, but researchers did not mention what those activities were in detail. Additionally, I did not find any studies that focused on how Oklahoma social studies teachers taught about racism in their classrooms. Other states with politically conservative state legislatures were mentioned, but information about Oklahoma specifically was absent. It is this gap in the literature that is addressed by my research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study takes the form of a basic qualitative study. As defined by Creswell (2008), it is qualitative because it relies on myself as the main instrument of data collection and uses multiple sources of data in the form of interviews. Additionally, I relied on my participants' experiences to discover meaning surrounding my research questions.

Context of Study

It is necessary to describe the geopolitical situation of this study in order to understand the context under which it operated. Oklahoma is one of the most politically

conservative states in the United States and its state leadership has worked to tightly control how teachers are able to instruct about racism in their classrooms. Oklahoma House Bill 1775 (2021) makes it illegal for teachers to teach about subjects that "any individual student should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex" (OK H.B. 1775). This has been interpreted to mean that teachers cannot teach about racism if it makes students uncomfortable in any way, even if it was not the teacher's intention to do so. Additionally, H.B. 1775 states that teachers cannot make it a part of their course that "meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race" (OK H.B. 1775). More recently, the state social studies standards were reviewed in March 2025, the content of which raised red flags for teachers, administrators, and legislators. The high school World History standards reference slavery once and do not mention racism at all. Even though the United States History standards do include topics about Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement, they do not mention slavery or racism by name.

Participants

Participant recruitment for pre-interview screening survey was done using purposive sampling using teacher coworkers, classmates from graduate courses, and other friends and acquaintances who are secondary social studies teachers. Snowball sampling (Simkus, 2023) was used to recruit additional survey participants in order to find the desired number of participants for the follow-up interview; initial participants that were recruited through purposive sampling were asked if they knew someone from

different schools and districts who might be interested in completing the survey. Lastly, I explored several OKC high school websites to find the contact information for their social studies teachers and recruitment emails containing the pre-screening survey were sent to them.

Table One

Table of Participants' Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Years in Profession	School Context	Subjects Taught
Ms. King	Female	White	17	Parochial high school, urban	Oklahoma History, AP U.S. History
Mr. Malcolm	Male	Multi-racial	11	Public high school, suburban	AP and on-level World History, Ethnic Studies
Ms. Luper	Female	White	1.5	Public high school, suburban	AP Human Geography, AP European History
Mr. Marshall	Male	White/ Native American	4	Parochial high school, urban	Oklahoma History, on-level US History and Government
Ms. Chisholm	Female	White	9	Public high school, suburban	Government and AP Human Geography

Data Sources

There are two data sources: the first was a pre-screening survey and the second was an individual interview which will be video- and audio-recorded. The potential participants received a recruiting email (see Appendix A) with information about the study and a link to the pre-screening survey. This pre-screening survey included demographic information such as their names and where they teach, as well as several statements about how they feel about teaching about racism in their classrooms. The participants responded to the survey statements on a Likert scale as to how much they agree with the statements (see Appendix B). This data helped me to understand the participants' teaching experience, their attitudes about teaching about racism at their current position, and their feelings about how their subject area standards and curriculum address topics about racism. The purpose of the pre-screening survey was to determine if the potential participants fulfilled criteria selection for the follow-up interview:

a. they had to be teachers in the Oklahoma City metro area (defined as being geographically located in Oklahoma, Canadian, or Cleveland county),
b. teaches United States history, world history, European history, civics or government, or geography, and
c. teaches about racism as a part of their curriculum and/or their standards.

Once the desired number of 10 eligible participants were found using the pre-screening survey, follow-up interviews were scheduled with those survey respondents who expressed a willingness to be contacted for an interview. The primary data source is interviews with the teachers. The follow up interviews were conducted either in-person or virtually, using the Zoom video conferencing application on the computer. Once I met with a participant, either in person or online, informed consent was obtained, and the

interview took place using the interview script (see Appendix C); unscripted questions were also asked depending on the participant's responses to obtain clarity or further information about a response. In-person interviews were recorded onto the computer using the Zoom application which also provided written transcripts of the conversation; the iPhone Voice Memos application was also used as an audio recording device in order to double-check the accuracy of the Zoom transcript. Three of the participants were met in person at OKC area coffee shops and a collegiate library while the remaining two participants were interviewed online. From the first recruitment email that contained the pre-screening survey to the last participant interview, it took roughly a week and a half to obtain data. Table One labels each participant with a pseudonym and briefly summarizes the participants' demographic information like gender, race, years in the teaching profession, their school's context, and the subjects they teach; I will take this opportunity to expand upon this information.

There was a total of five participants in my study. All of them were personally known to me at varying levels of familiarity: one was a coworker and someone I consider a close friend, one was a teacher who I met through my experience working in the Oklahoma Archdiocesan Catholic schools, and the remaining three were fellow classmates I met at graduate school. My participants had a wide variety of years of experience; anywhere from a new teacher with 1.5 years of experience to a veteran teacher with 17 years under her belt. All of my participants were social studies teachers, four of whom were actively teaching in an Advanced Placement setting. When I consider the characteristics of these participants, I would describe them all as justice-oriented and equity-focused not only in their personal lives, but also their professional

ones. They are dedicated to the pursuit of providing a high-quality education to their students that helps develop critical thinking skills, promotes open-mindedness, and enables their students to be well-rounded and productive members of American society. It seems to me that they all recognize how challenging it has become to teach about racism not only in Oklahoma but in the United States in general. I get the impression – especially from the participants who were public school teachers – that the teaching profession is under fire from many different angles and that teaching about racism has somehow become taboo, even though the topic is in the state standards and district curricula. It is as if teaching about racism has become a subversive act in Oklahoma, and that talking about it puts them at risk professionally; when I interviewed Mr. Malcolm, he did not share his real name even though I assured him that all his information would be de-identified. This apprehension to share personal information pervaded my interviews with my other participants, although to a lesser extent with those who were parochial schoolteachers.

Data Analysis

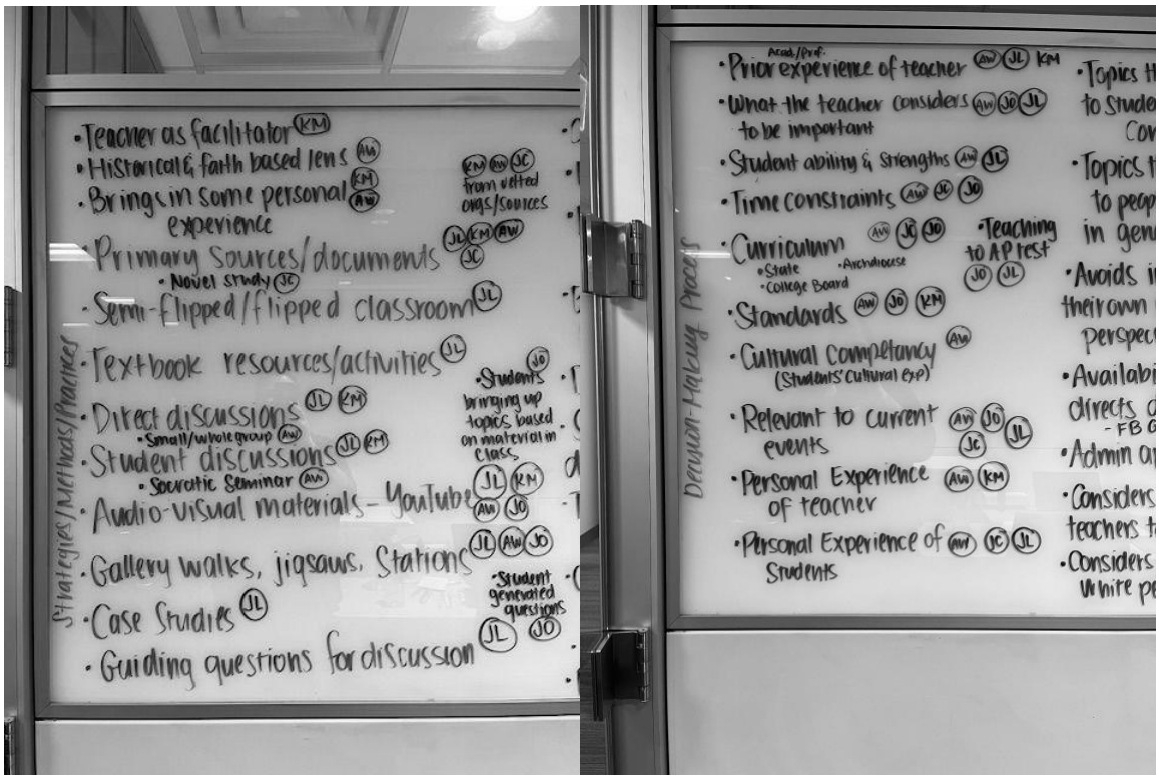
Following the interview with the participants, I created short reflective memos about the experience which were emailed to my thesis advisor. In these memos, I detailed the place and time of the interviews and some initial impressions about the interview experience. I downloaded the Zoom transcript of the interview, formatted it for ease of reading, and edited its content with confirmation from the audio recording from my iPhone. Once I had the desired number of interviews completed and transcribed, I then used a five-phase method of data analysis outlined by Bingham (2023) to analyze my data. Below are the steps I followed.

1. I read each interview transcript to familiarize myself with its contents.
2. With my two research questions in mind, I highlighted, in different colors, data that corresponded to the research questions. For instance, while looking for strategies, methods, and practices that the teacher used to teach about racism, I highlighted activities such as *discussions, conversations, gallery walks,* and *primary sources.* When looking for information in the transcripts about the teacher's decision-making process, I highlighted things like *standards and curriculum, time constraints,* and *personal experience of students.* I also recorded in my notebook the results of what was highlighted in each interview's transcript - organized by research question- so it would be easier and faster for me to navigate the information in later phases of data analysis.
3. Once all the transcripts had been read through and highlighted with the research questions in mind, I assigned each transcript's notes a random number created by an online random number generator to read through them a third time. The transcripts were randomly labeled because I wanted to prevent the narrative of one transcript from dominating that of the others. I read through the strategies, methods, and practices section of the first randomly assigned transcript's notes and recorded each activity on a whiteboard; for instance, writing *audio-visual materials* with the initials of the participant *(JL)* next to it. I then read through the same section of the subsequent four transcript notes; if the next participant mentioned the same or similar strategy, method, or practice, I added their initials next to it on the whiteboard. If a strategy, method, or practice had not been mentioned previously, I added it to the list on the whiteboard. Once I completed

reading through all the transcripts' strategies, methods, and practices, I reassigned the transcripts a new randomly generated number and read through each transcripts' notes about the teachers' decision-making processes with the same process as before: factors influencing the decision-making process included *administration approval/support* and *comfort level when teaching about racism.*

Figure 1

Examples of Photographs of Phase Three Data Analysis Involving Whiteboard



4. Using the photographs generated from phase three, I wrote each observation on an index card and color-coded it depending on the research question to which it corresponded. I also included which participant(s) engaged in that action. Once all the observations were recorded onto index cards and color-coded, I read

through them and began to physically group them according to their similarities. The similarities that emerged became the themes of the information revealed in the participants' interviews, and some of the themes ended up having related sub-themes (see Tables Two and Three). Those observations that did not seem to have similarities with others were dropped from consideration.

Table Two

Data Analysis Themes Surrounding Teacher Strategies, Methods, and Practices

Theme	Sub-Themes and Observations
Teacher Actions	<u>Classroom Setting and Communication</u> - Teacher being open and honest about racism - Transparency with parents about topics and material through classroom newsletters and syllabus - Working with sympathy, empathy, and compassion - Providing a safe space for conversations to happen about hard topics - Setting up expectations for students about participating in discussions about hard topics - Having students practice having discussions about hard topics - Teacher holds conferences with student to check in how students feel about the class and how they are doing - Encouraging students to participate to their comfort level <u>Maintaining Diversity of Perspectives</u> - Considering student ethnic and cultural backgrounds in activities - Using multiple perspectives in instructional materials - Offering students as many resources as possible during instructional activities <u>Teacher Actions Regarding Themselves</u> - Educating themselves in non-Eurocentric narratives to improve their own base of knowledge - Bringing in relevant personal experience to enrich instructional materials or activities
Student Actions	- Conversations with each other - Grapple with difficult concepts - Bringing up topics from outside of class based on instructional material - Generate their own questions about classroom topics - Engaging in organic conversations with teacher about current events - Student-led debates
Classroom and Instructional Activities	- Using a semi-flipped or flipped classroom for students' homework activities - Small group or whole class discussions - Socratic seminars - Providing guiding questions for student discussion - Gallery walks, jigsaw activities, and stations/centers - Direct instruction of vocabulary or historical context - Reflective journaling - Providing open-ended questions for student consideration - Encouraging students to find connections between history and current events
Resources Utilized in Classroom Activities and Instruction	- Utilizing primary sources and documents from vetted/reliable organizations such as the Library of Congress, US State Department, and Oklahoma Historical Center - Providing as unbiased documents as possible - Textbook resources and activities - Instructional materials and resources from Facebook teacher groups - Audio-visual materials like YouTube videos, photographs, and documentaries - Case studies - Novel study

Table Three
Data Analysis Themes Surrounding Teacher Decision-Making

Theme	Sub-Themes and Observations
Considering the Students	- Student strengths and ability - Personal experiences of students - Academic experience of students and their prior knowledge of the topic - Cultural competency and considering the cultural backgrounds of the students in class
Teacher Related Factors	<u>Teacher Attitudes and Thinking</u> - What the teacher considers to be important for the students to know - Considers it "our duty" as social studies teachers to teach about racism - Wanting to protect themselves from scrutiny or punishment (losing certification, anxiety, fear) - Avoidance of incorporating own political perspective <u>Teacher Experience</u> - Personal experience - Academic and/or professional experience <u>Personal Characteristics</u> - Considers position and/or privilege as a white person - Considers position as a person of color - Age and gender
Choice of Topics	<u>Relevancy of Topics</u> - Topics that are important to people today in general - Topics that are important the students and/or the school community - Relevant to current events <u>Novelty of Topics</u> - Piquing student interests/novelty of subject - "Hot" topics <u>Availability of Topics</u> - Availability of resources on particular topics dictates what topics to teach (if it can be found on teacher Facebook pages, peers, or previous instructor) - Having primary sources or government documents to "back up" or legitimize the choice to teach
Factors Outside of Teacher Control	- Time constraints - Having a set curriculum such as College Board - Having to teach to an AP exam - Making sure that what they are teaching adheres to state or archdiocesan standards - State legislation, such as Oklahoma H.B. 1775 - Administrative support or approval

5A. Phase five of the data analysis involved comparing my results to the information outlined in the literature review. In regard to strategies, methods, and practices, the literature revealed that discussions about racism were widely used during instructional time and were often used in conjunction with other activities. These discussions also included teacher conversations with students, where students were encouraged to participate and form ownership. My study also indicates that my participants also relied on discussions and conversations when addressing racism; Mr. Marshall, Mr. Malcolm, and Ms. Luper all stated that they used discussions in many different forms when talking about racism with their students. In particular, Mr. Marshall likes to use discussions in the form of Socratic seminars because it allows the students to interact with each other in a very organic way, free from the teacher's interference. Mr. Malcolm also sees tremendous value in having students participate in discussions about race because, "... A discussion based on race, whether it's, like, it could be a very interesting discussion, sometimes could be contentious, but at the same time, this is the grounds to be open-minded, and to… ensure that we are valuing everybody's opinions." Even though Ms. Chisholm did not state that she uses discussion very much, she sees the value in students having them in her classroom because "... this is probably the last safe space for them to ask these questions without them being ridiculed, whether it be online or when they're out in public in college or other things, when people are probably not gonna [sic] be as generous or as understanding."

5B. Another similarity to the literature review that I found was in the area of teacher decision-making, where teacher beliefs and actions, lived experiences, and emotions all play a role in the decision-making process. Ms. King was very firm in her belief that “we’re all humans and… it’s our duty and our responsibility to kind of understand the human experience, not just from our views, but from other people’s views.” Teacher beliefs in teaching what they considered to be important was mentioned several times in participant interviews, as was teaching about topics that were important to either the school community, the students themselves, or people in general. Lived experiences of both the teacher and the student also figures largely in participant decision-making. The participants’ academic and professional background as well as their personal characteristics influence their perspectives about how they teach about racism because according to Ms. King, “... being a white woman, like, maybe it doesn’t seem as authentic [instruction about racism] as it might be coming from somebody else… Even though it might not be something that I personally experienced, it’s something that I can understand and definitely empathize with.” Ms. Chisholm shared a similar perspective: “I think also as a white person, I can’t speak on every experience, nor do I feel comfortable doing that just because I come from a lens of privilege.” Additionally, Mr. Marshall, who is of Native American ancestry, had this to say about incorporating his personal experiences into their instruction: “I like to bring my personal Native American background into history as well… I think it really resonates with some of our students and… I think it’s really awesome that I could resonate with them in that regard.” Student lived

experiences, such as their personal lives, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and academic abilities and strengths also impact teacher decision-making in major ways.

5C. Lastly, emotions play a significant role in decision-making, particularly with the participants who teach in public schools. Anxiety, fear, and avoidance of scrutiny by administration and/or the state board of education all lead the public-school participants to make sure what they are teaching about racism is grounded in their standards or curriculum which act as a kind of safety net for the teachers. Even though the parochial schoolteachers are not required to use state standards or answer to the state board of education, they are acutely aware of the situation facing their public-school counterparts. They also make sure that what they are teaching about racism is also aligned with their appropriate standards or curriculum in the event that they are asked to defend their choices by administration or parents.

Limitations

Some may consider the sample size of this study (n=5) to be a limitation; however, the nature of qualitative research does not require a minimum sample size. As a teacher, recruiting other teachers to be participants in my study should be a relatively simple task. However, participant selection proved to be somewhat challenging as data collection began at the end of the school year for OKC-area schools and the only contact information I had for most of the potential participants was their school email addresses; many teachers do not check their work email once the school year has ended. This may have had a negative impact on the number of participants I could

recruit. All of the study participants were known to me through professional or academic relationships. Some may see this as a limitation, but this actually can prove to be an asset because the close pre-existing relationships I had with the participants allowed me to engage in deeper conversations with them more quickly than if I were working with participants with whom I had no close personal relationships.

Findings

The main idea that has emerged from this study is that education about racism is taking place in OKC area schools. There are three findings that fall under the umbrella of this main idea: teachers use a variety of strategies, methods, and practices rooted in the use of primary sources to teach about racism in their classrooms, they frequently check to make sure that their instruction is aligned with their required standards and/or curriculum, and the political situation in Oklahoma is a heavy cloud that hangs over the minds of the participants.

Strategies, Methods, Practices, and Primary Sources

Discussions were featured as a practice in a few of the participants' classrooms. Mr. Marshall went even as far as to say, "I love group discussions because I think it's important for students to be able to talk about hard topics like history and racism and to be able to… share their beliefs and opinions about it with each other." Participants provided guidance, expectations, and structure for their students to successfully and respectfully engage in discussions, even going as far as providing them practice discussion topics so the students could refine their discussion abilities over time. Conversations about racism also took place between the participants and their students, especially when the historical material they learned in class was reflected in current

events outside of class. For instance, when thinking about planning for the next school year, Ms. Luper stated, “With AP Human Geography, we literally have a whole unit on population and migrations, and so we talk about immigration and things like that, and so particularly thinking about right now, LA [Los Angeles] and what they’re experiencing and what they’re experiencing and anti-immigration sentiments… my fifth hour, we would fall into those kinds of conversations.”

Discussions about racism were not the sole activity utilized by the participants; they used a wide range of activities such as open-ended questions, case studies, journaling, gallery walks, jigsaws, and stations where the students would frequently use primary sources to construct knowledge and form their own conclusions about racism. All of the participants emphasized the use of primary sources in their instruction especially when it came to instruction about race and racism because not only do primary sources offer an authentic perspective of historical events, they offer the opportunity for students to engage in critical thinking to determine meaning. Primary sources also provide a chance for students to make a connection between past and present, enabling them to see cause and effect in real time. When his students worked with primary sources about the role of Asian immigrant workers on the Transcontinental Railroad in the United States, Mr. Malcolm offers his students a variety of open-ended analytical questions like “What do you notice about this photograph? Anything else you notice? Where do you guys think they are? What are you thinking? Why do you think that?”. The students are able to use their prior knowledge about the historical topic to then think critically about the primary source of the photograph, searching for an explanation of why only white men in suits were in the photograph and not the Asian

workers who were responsible for the construction of the railroad. When asked about why they relied on primary sources for instruction, the participants offered similar explanations: that the primary sources documented what happened in history, and that the students were able to construct their own meaning about historical events which seemed to be much more significant than if the teacher had relied on direct instruction or some other strategy, method, or practice.

Standards and Curriculum

All of the participants stated that they rely heavily on their courses' standards and/or curriculum to guide their instruction not only about racism but also instruction in general. When asked how they decide what kinds of activities and resources to use when teaching about racism, participants mentioned things like "pulling straight from the standards", "stuck to the CED [the Course and Exam Description, the curriculum offered by College Board for Advanced Placement classes]", and "following the Oklahoma state curriculum, even though I don't have to". Participants had to give particular consideration to topics that came up in class that were not specifically mentioned in their standards or curriculum, especially if students brought up the topics in class and expressed an interest in learning about them. The participants recognized the importance of addressing those topics and found ways to make connections between those topics and their standards, thus justifying their choices for including them in their instruction. Mr. Malcolm, who teaches Ethnic Studies - which does not have a set of official Oklahoma standards - found that the goals and topics discussed in his class were mentioned in elementary school standards: "It would be elementary standards because we're talking about all groups of people are all accepted and stuff like that…

that's all the elementary standards. So, I'm still adhering to state standards." Ms. Chisholm also mentioned several times that she reviews her standards constantly, making sure that the content she is teaching adheres to them; she said that the standards in her Government class are somewhat vague, so it is possible to connect a myriad of topics to her standards. All but one of the participants are AP teachers and their students are being taught the content and skills that are necessary for them to be successful on the AP tests they will take in the spring, so these participants must constantly check to make sure that their classroom instruction aligns with the AP curriculum.

Oklahoma's Political Situation

As previously mentioned, Oklahoma is one of the most politically conservative state governments in the country and its legislature has passed multiple laws that dictate what kinds of content can be taught in schools and the way that teachers can instruct about difficult topics. Teachers and school districts have come under fire by the state department of education for offering classes, books, novels, and training about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality and this has resulted in fear and anxiety spreading throughout Oklahoma teachers. Teaching credentials have been revoked and teachers have been fired. School districts like Edmond Public Schools have refused to adhere to the state superintendent's mandates about removing reading materials which then resulted in the superintendent threatening to downgrade the district's accreditation (Martinez-Keel, 2024). Demotion in accreditation actually occurred in two Oklahoma school districts in 2022: in Mustang, a complaint was received that a student team-building activity at Mustang Middle School that talked about race and discrimination

made a student feel uncomfortable. Additionally, a complaint was received against the Tulsa School District because of a racial bias training video that teachers watched as part of a larger training module (Martinez-Keel, 2022).

This atmosphere of fear is no different for the participants in my study; however, this sentiment is felt more strongly by the three participants who are public school teachers than the parochial teachers. When Mr. Malcolm first started teaching Ethnic Studies, he admits to "playing it safe" because "you're in a state that is not necessarily very welcoming of things that they want to call DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion], which is a very thinly veiled way of just saying black and brown bodies". He knows that classes like Ethnic Studies have garnered negative attention across the country and in some places have been outright banned. Ms. Luper, the participant with the least amount of teaching experience, expressed perhaps the highest amount of anxiety and fear for her position because she teaches in a community she considers to be "very conservative" and she graduated from the school where she currently teaches. She recognizes that she grew up as a conservative person but her experiences in college changed her political worldview. Her previous relationships with the school's teachers and families makes her especially cautious and she is extremely aware of how she is perceived by people. She stated, "the big overwhelming picture is, like, Ryan Walters [the state superintendent], and you know, the fear that I could lose my teaching certificate at any time just by saying the wrong thing, or the right thing to the wrong student."

Despite the fear, anxiety, and apprehension surrounding the participants, they are finding ways to teach about racism in their classes by using the standards and

curriculum, instructional practices, and primary resources as a way to protect themselves from negative consequences. For instance, when talking about adhering to her standards, Ms. Chisholm outright stated that “I want to be protected with our current political climate.” She constantly checks her standards when she or the students want to talk about something that might not be entirely outlined in her standards, and she finds ways to make it work by referencing materials that are explicitly mentioned in the standards and making connections to the topic in question. She again alludes to Oklahoma’s political situation: “... because of the climate that we’re in, just double-check my standards, just to make sure that what I want to talk about aligns with them.” In terms of instructional practices, Mr. Malcolm made it very clear that he does not use leading questions when facilitating conversations about racism in his classroom because “for me as an educator, it’d be doing a disservice to A, education, B, the institution, and C, the students for me to pigeonhole them into maybe one or two decisive commentaries without nuance… It would never be my intention because that’s gross. Like, that’s a perversion of the profession.” He relies heavily on student construction of knowledge based on the open-ended questions he provides as another way to protect himself; if he does encounter scrutiny or feedback from parents that question his teaching methods, he can always justify his choices because “I’m adhering to what the state wants, I’m also adhering to what the student is thinking” and not his own personal perspective. Mr. Marshall adopts a similar approach to student-generated knowledge as Mr. Malcolm does, stating “it’s one of the most important factors for teaching… It’s to let the students make the interpretations themselves, rather than being told what to think. Let them be the ones to think for themselves.” It seems like a

common theme amongst the participants is an emphasis on student-centered creation of knowledge and perspectives of racism; it is only the public-school teachers who utilize it as a layer of protection from censure from outside sources.

Additionally, Mr. Malcolm finds support in the primary sources he has the students use because they are the first-hand accounts of historical events; they are the historical facts upon which his students form their thoughts and opinions. He frequently uses vetted resources like the Library of Congress, U.S. State Department, and the Oklahoma state department of education to find primary sources; in his opinion, potential opponents of his instruction cannot argue with the primary sources he uses because “it’s the government itself, they are saying we have caused injustice to other people and are documenting it on the Internet.”. Related to Mr. Malcolm’s use of primary sources as a layer of protection is Ms. Luper’s use of her subject’s textbook, which was adopted by the school district. She feels safer knowing she can point out the district’s support of the textbook as a rationale for her choices, that “that’s what our textbook says, this is what the district adopted.” Even though Mr. Marshall and Ms. King may not feel like they need to protect themselves nearly as much as their public school counterparts, they also use primary sources from the Library of Congress, the Oklahoma state department of education, and the Oklahoma Historical Center because of the high quality of the primary sources available from those institutions.

Discussion

The central theme that developed from this study is that despite the actions of the Oklahoma state government and state department of education, instruction about racism is still taking place in OKC metro area schools. Participants approach instruction

about racism very carefully out of fear of public backlash that may include revocation of their teaching certificate and other consequences for their school. As indicated by the study participants, they use a variety of strategies, methods, and practices based on the use of primary sources to teach about racism in their classrooms and they frequently consult their standards and/or curriculum to make sure their instruction and topics in class are aligned with them. Lastly, the political atmosphere in Oklahoma is one that weighs heavily on the minds of teachers and they adopt several tactics to cope with it. This is important because social studies teachers across the country who are facing situations like that of Oklahoma teachers need to know that there are ways for them to address the topic of racism in their classrooms in a way that is not only satisfactory to them and develops their students' critical thinking skills, but also keeps their careers safe. Since the country's trend of political conservatism seems to be continuing apace, social studies teachers need to adapt in order to do the important work of effectively educating their students about racism without fear.

Implications and Recommendations

There are several important implications for teachers in this study. Teachers, especially those in conservative cities or states, should be aware that there are ways to teach about racism that are acceptable to their communities. These ways also promote students' critical thinking skills, engage them in the construction of their own knowledge, and align with the teachers' beliefs and values about racism education. Teachers should know how to make their standards and curricula work for them and their students; to accomplish this, much more work needs to be done in the area of meaningful professional development for Social Studies teachers. Related to this is the need for

anti-racist training for all teachers because even though racism may be more directly addressed in the Social Studies, racism affects everybody regardless of their skin color or the subject they teach. School administrators need to continue to support their teachers in this work because it provides another layer of protection for them from potential negative consequences from lawmakers or community members. Lastly, teachers should build a strong support system of fellow educators upon which they can rely; this will provide opportunities for personal and professional support when they experience difficult times in their careers such as what has been described in this study.

Conclusion

This study makes several contributions to the area of research that deals with how social studies teachers instruct about racism in their classrooms, particularly how those teachers who live in politically conservative areas conduct their work. There has been some research on this subject, but not specifically about how Oklahoma City-area teachers are addressing the topic of racism in their classrooms. This study corroborates the works of Washington and Humphries (2011), Chandler (2011), Brown and Brown (2011), Castro et al. (2015), and Bolgatz (2005) by revealing the use of discussions and conversations about racism by the study participants; it also confirms the fact that discussion was not the sole strategy, method, or practice that the participants used to teach about racism. Additionally, the study confirms the idea that teacher decision-making is complicated in that the participants consider many factors such as teacher beliefs and actions (Washington and Humphries, 2011, Martell and Stevens, 201, Willis, 2009, Thornton, 1989, and Schmidt et al., 1996). The lived experiences of both the teacher and the students also feature in the participants' decision-making process as

reflected in the works of Castro et al. (2015), Martell and Stevens (2019), Girard et al. (2020), and Villareal (2019). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for the study participants, emotions play a significant role in their decision-making process as outlined in the works of Sheppard and Levy (2018) and Zembylas (2007).

As a subject, social studies was founded in part as a way to categorize people based on their skin color, which promulgates a racist ideology. History is the story of racism - either in the United States, Europe, or worldwide. To teach about it is to plan ahead: to make sure that current and future human beings do not repeat the mistakes of the past. There is no better subject in which to educate students about racism than Social Studies and schools have a responsibility to teach about it. It is a Social Studies teacher's obligation to teach their students about racism so they are educated, knowledgeable citizens who can fully participate in the democratic process and contribute to the creation of well-rounded communities. To avoid teaching about racism because it is difficult or out of fear for oneself is damaging not only to students of color but also to white students as well because it tells an inaccurate, incomplete story of history. When students are denied a truthful account of the past, they are denied the tools necessary to understand current-day inequalities.

For today's students, current events are more than what they see on the television; for some of them, it is a lived experience that they must grapple with every day. They will naturally bring their personal lives into the classroom if current events affect them directly. Racism is not consigned to some dusty textbook in a classroom, but a reality they see every day. It is unlikely that students of the future will have less access to 24-hour news; in fact, they are more likely to have more access with the

advent of more advanced technology and applications they can access on the phones they keep on them at all times. Today's students express a constant desire to discuss current events that deal with racism, especially if something they saw online connects to the material that the teacher is covering in class. In fact, they see a tremendous value in learning about these topics as expressed by Mr. Malcolm's Ethnic Studies students: "This class is really awesome, this is super important, and we actually think this class should be necessary." These students want to learn how to help and further the cause of education about racism and should be encouraged.

Lastly, the political atmosphere of the United States continues to have a major influence on educational policy especially when it comes to education about racism. As states persist in restricting how and what teachers can instruct about racism, teachers need to know how to teach about it in a way that facilitates student learning, but also protects their careers. As revealed in this study, teachers will educate their students about racism in ways that align with their subject's standards and/or curricula regardless of how conservative the state or federal government becomes. This balancing act requires some creativity in the teacher's strategies, methods, practices, and decision-making in order to meet educational goals and adhere to legal boundaries. This further demonstrates teachers' strong professional commitment to truth-telling and historical accuracy, even under pressure. It also highlights the growing need for continued professional development and institutional support to help teachers navigate politically charged content cautiously yet confidently. Despite the challenges that face them, Oklahoma City-area teachers remain committed to providing students with an accurate and thorough understanding of racism in American and world history and societies.

Epilogue

This thesis was conceived of during the last two semesters of my graduate school experience. I had always intended to complete research on how teachers address social justice issues in their classrooms, and it was narrowed down into the topic that appears in this paper over the course of my time in graduate school. The interviews with my participants took place in June of 2025 and my thesis defense took place about three months later in September. Many significant events have taken place in Oklahoma and American politics during that time, and because my research is closely tied to the political situation at both the state and national level, my thesis committee and I felt it would be prudent to add an epilogue to this work to provide an opportunity to consider how this research continues to be important to research in education.

To begin with, the current presidential administration issued Executive Order 14151 on the day of his inauguration in January 2025; titled “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing”, this Executive Order requires the termination of all activities that relates to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility by federal offices (Executive Order 14151, 2025). Two years prior to this Executive Order, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt issued Executive Order 2023-31 with the intention of dismantling DEI programs across the state, which directly affected state offices and public colleges and universities. Oklahoma State Senate Bill 796, passed in 2025, codified these anti-DEI measures for public colleges and universities: it prohibits the use of state funds for colleges and universities to promote any work or trainings that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The federal and state governments would argue that these measures were put into place to “level the playing field”, so to speak,

because it eliminates recognition of people based on race, gender, sexuality, or any other outstanding characteristic. In a sense, the government is saying “we don’t see color” thereby denying the shared history, struggle, and accomplishments of people of color. All of these measures combined will seriously impact how race and racism is taught at all levels of education in Oklahoma and around the country for several reasons. One, it is essential to teach about multiple perspectives when teaching about racism; without utilizing DEI initiatives, it basically narrows down storytelling to that of a single, inaccurate, incomplete perspective. Secondly, teaching about racism teaches that communities, especially communities of color, have been shaped by unequal histories and opportunities; the ability to discuss systemic racism is made difficult by anti-DEI initiatives like Executive Order 14151. Lastly, as seen in the literature and the results of my study, teaching about racism requires the creation of safe and honest learning environments so students feel comfortable sharing their stories and developing their skills. Contrary to conservative lawmakers, being inclusive promotes learning and understanding instead of placing blame and pointing fingers.

Another series of relevant current events includes the actions of Oklahoma’s now former state superintendent, Ryan Walters. In April 2025, Walters mandated that Oklahoma school districts sign a Title IV assurance, pledging not to engage in discriminatory practices that may fall under the purview of DEI. Any school district that did not sign this assurance would potentially face a withholding of federal reimbursement payments that the district relies upon to function. This requirement, which basically amounts to extortion on Walters’ part, puts school districts in a difficult position; they may feel pressured to avoid certain programs or topics that may be seen

as discriminatory. Conversations held in classrooms could be stifled out of fear of violating the Title IV assurance.

Another one of Walters' actions that impacts how racism is taught in classrooms was the revision to the Oklahoma state social studies standards over the course of 2025. These new standards allegedly highlight American exceptionalism and remove DEI content and/or anything that could be considered "indoctrination". It is understood by many educators that "indoctrination" seems to mean any point of view that may criticize the United States' treatment of marginalized groups throughout its history. By removing anything having to do with DEI in the social studies standards, this again could stifle the discussion of race and racism in classrooms and impinges on the pedagogical freedom teachers are supposed to have when they choose how to address a topic in their classrooms. There could be a reduction in the amount of discussion on systemic critiques of racism and oppression as well as a censoring of power-based perspectives about race. As seen in the findings of my research, teachers are extremely cognizant of how their instruction about racism could be received or perceived, and all it could take is one dissatisfied parent or member of the community to raise a red flag about what is being taught in classrooms to bring their instruction to a screeching halt.

With all of these considerations, the question arises: "Is it safer now to teach about racism in Oklahoma?" Unfortunately, I do not think so. The influence of the president's administration is just too great. It will take years, if not decades, to undo the effects of his Executive Orders and other legislation and make teachers feel safe to teach about racism again. As mentioned several times in my research findings, teachers use primary sources, their curricula, and state standards as a way to shield themselves

from criticism and keep their own positions safe while encouraging their students to interact with material, draw their own conclusions, and think deeply about race and racism. But does this mean that by playing it safe, the teachers are introducing a watered-down version of history to their students? I know that the participants in my study are doing the very best they can to teach about racism in a time and place where it is not popular to do so. They still maintain their professional integrity and their purpose as social studies teachers to present information about racism to their students and facilitate the students' navigation through a very difficult topic. However, more questions arise: what could education about racism look like without all of this legislation that regulates it? What would education about racism look like if Oklahoma teachers did not have to regulate themselves and how they teach because they are constantly operating under the threat of losing their jobs and licensure? It is difficult to answer these questions because we live and work in a time and country where it seems nearly impossible to dream of these more ideal circumstances. We will only find the answers over the course of time.

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Appendix A - Pre-Screening Survey Recruitment Email

Hello *name of participant,*

My name is Agatha Gasperoni and I am conducting a study as a part of my Master's of Education degree thesis with the University of Oklahoma in the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum department. The purpose of my study is to investigate how Oklahoma City metro area social studies teachers teach about racism in their classrooms. You are receiving this email because you are a social studies teacher in the OKC metro area. I am reaching out to you to participate in my study. Your participation is totally voluntary, and your insights would be extremely valuable in helping to understand how teachers in the OKC metro area teach about racism.

What's involved:

- A pre-interview screening survey: the first part of the study involves an anonymous online survey which would take about 10-15 minutes. The survey will be open for the next two weeks.
- Follow-Up Interview: at the end of the pre-screening survey, you will have the option to volunteer for a follow-up interview if you are interested. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and can be conducted face-to-face or online, based on your preference.

Confidentiality: Please be assured that your participation is entirely confidential. The survey responses are anonymous, and all interview data will be de-identified to protect your identity.

If you are willing to participate, please click the link below to begin the survey:
https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8eQAgxWsMEN30uW

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at any time. I truly appreciate your consideration of this important study and look forward to your potential involvement.

Sincerely,
Agatha Gasperoni

Appendix B - Pre-Screening Survey Questions

Study Information and Online Consent Form

I am Agatha-Beth C. Gasperoni from the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum department and I invite you to participate in my research entitled Oklahoma City Metro Teachers and Racism Education This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Social Studies teacher in the OKC metro area. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this research.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions you may have BEFORE agreeing to participate in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? This research aims to gather information from Oklahoma City metro area teachers about their experience teaching about racism in their classrooms. The results of this survey will be used to identify a smaller pool of individuals who will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview about the topic.

How many participants will be in this research? About 20 people will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will complete an approximately 15-minute online survey. You will be required to answer all questions.

What are the risks and benefits if I participate? Collection of demographic or geographic location data that could lead to deductive re-identification: You will be asked to provide demographic and/or geographic information that describes you. Different combinations of personal and geographic information may make it possible, but unlikely, for your identity to be guessed by someone who was given, or gained access, to our research records. To minimize the risk of deductive re-identification, we will not combine identifying variables nor analyze and report results for small groups of people with specific demographic characteristics. To minimize this risk, your demographic/geographic information will not be shared to anyone other than myself and my faculty advisor.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? There will be no information in research reports that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't

have to answer any questions and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified.

What will happen to my data in the future? We will not share your data or use it in future research.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns, or complaints? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at acgasperoni@ou.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Kristy Brugar, at kristy.a.brugar@ou.edu. You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

I attest that I am at least 18 years old and I consent to completing this online survey.

- Yes
- No

1. How long have you taught?
    a. 0 Years
    b. 1-5 Years
    c. 6-10 Years
    d. 11-15 Years
    e. 16-20 Years
    f. 20+ Years

2. Do you work in a school located within an Oklahoma City metro school district (within Canadian, Oklahoma, and Cleveland counties)? This includes private and parochial schools.
    a. Yes
    b. No

3. Which school district do you currently work in?
    a. Oklahoma City Public Schools
    b. Edmond Public Schools
    c. Moore Public Schools
    d. Mid-Del City Public Schools
    e. Norman Public Schools
    f. Choctaw-Nicoma Park Public Schools
    g. Millwood Public Schools

h. Crooked Oak Public Schools
i. Mustang Public Schools
j. Yukon Public Schools
k. Deer Creek Public Schools
l. Other, please specify:
m. I work in a private/parochial school, please specify:

4. What subject(s) do you teach / have you taught? Select all that apply.
a. World History
b. United States History
c. Oklahoma History
d. Geography
e. Civics/Government
f. Other, please specify:

5. How would you rate your comfort level in teaching topics related to/about racism?
a. Very comfortable
b. Somewhat comfortable
c. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
d. Somewhat comfortable
e. Very uncomfortable

6. How comprehensive do you feel your subject area's standards are when it comes to teaching about racism? These could be state standards, standards from College Board, or your district's standards.
a. Very comprehensive
b. Somewhat comprehensive
c. Neutral
d. Somewhat limited
e. Very limited

7. How much freedom do you feel that you have to make decisions about how you implement state or other standards?
a. A great deal of freedom
b. A moderate amount of freedom
c. Neutral
d. Very little freedom
e. No freedom at all

8. How supportive do you feel your administration is in how you teach about racism in your classroom?
a. Very supportive
b. Somewhat supportive
c. Neither supportive nor unsupportive
d. Somewhat unsupportive

e. Very unsupportive

9. How satisfied are you with what you are able to teach about racism?
   a. Extremely satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   d. Somewhat dissatisfied
   e. Extremely dissatisfied

10. How satisfied are you with how you are able to teach about racism?
   a. Extremely satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   d. Somewhat dissatisfied
   e. Extremely dissatisfied

11. In your opinion, how well do the state/other standards align with your values about racism education?
   a. Extremely well
   b. Very well
   c. Neutral
   d. Slightly well
   e. Not well at all

12. How important do you think the study of racism is to the study of History?
   a. Extremely important
   b. Very Important
   c. Neutral
   d. Slightly important
   e. Not at all important

13. How frequently do you consider your students' backgrounds and experiences when you teach about racism?
   a. Always
   b. Most of the time
   c. About half the time
   d. Sometimes
   e. Never

14. How much time over the course of a school year do you estimate that you spend on topics about or related to racism?
   a. Less than 5 hours
   b. 6-10 hours
   c. 11-15 hours
   d. 16-20 hours
   e. 20+ hours

15. How often do your students investigate primary documents when learning about racism?

a. Always
b. Most of the time
c. About half the time
d. Sometimes
e. Never

16. How frequently, when teaching about racism, are your students able to use critical thinking skills like analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and/or creation?

a. Always
b. Most of the time
c. About half the time
d. Sometimes
e. Never

17. How willing are you to meet again in person for an interview about how you teach about racism in your classroom? Your identifying information would be kept anonymous.

a. Extremely willing, here's my email address:
b. Very willing, here's my email address:
c. Somewhat willing, here's my email address:
d. Not willing at all.

Appendix C - Interview Questions Script

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview. I know your time is very valuable, so I appreciate your responses.

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you worked as a teacher?
3. What subjects do you teach, and how long have you taught them?
4. I see that you currently teach as school name. How long have you taught at your current school?
5. *As you may have seen from the survey you took, my research is centered around how teachers teach about racism in their classrooms. I'm specifically investigating what strategies, methods, and practices teachers use, and the decision-making process that they use when they determine how and what they teach.* With that in mind, how do you approach the topic of racism in your classroom?
6. What kinds of resources do your students use when learning about racism? *Follow up: can you share some specific examples of them?*
7. What kinds of activities do your students engage in when learning about racism?
8. How do you decide what kinds of activities and resources to use when teaching about racism?
9. *Professionally, academically, or personally,* how do your own experiences, beliefs, or background influence the way you teach about racism?
10. What specific historical or contemporary examples of racism do you include in your teaching? Why? *Follow up: How do you prioritize or pursue these examples with your students?*
11. *So as we know, racism is really important to the study of history and social studies. Something I'm interested in are the challenges that teachers face when they teach about racism.* So, can you tell me about the challenges that you encounter when teaching about racism, and how have you addressed them?
12. What role do current events play in how you teach about racism?

I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation during this time. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me around the topic of teaching racism that I didn't ask?