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# How can teaching English be more inclusive, notably regarding African American history?

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Master's Thesis

« Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation » Anglais 2<sup>nd</sup> Degré

Université Lumière Lyon 2

**How can teaching English be more inclusive,  
notably regarding African American history?**

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Under the direction of Agnès DELAHAYE

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## **Introduction**

In light of recent events, notably the murder of George Floyd by the police and the Black Lives Matter Movement, the history of the United States is being put into question again in regard to how its story is being told and taught and talked about, specifically the history of African Americans. These events, while recent, represent a much deeper problem regarding African American history since its beginning. This not only concerns the way individuals from the United States understand their country as well as individuals from around the world, but how these events are taught and studied in the education system. While this issue begins with the way that US history is taught in its own schools throughout the country, it also extends to the way that United States' history is presented in foreign school systems, in textbooks and resources. This dissertation aims to compare and assess the way that this history is taught in the United States and France as well as the “culture wars” and “polarization” around the history of race and slavery. Understanding the recent quarrel that surrounds the teaching of African American history, such as enslavement, Reconstruction, the Black Liberation Movement, amongst other events, will provide further insight into how this argument with its complicated history resurged into the foreground as a main topic of debate.

The classroom is an environment where students shape the perceptions of their role and place in history. Keeping this in mind, it is necessary to question the inclusivity or exclusivity of the education being used in the classroom. Questions such as, “Has teaching become political again after the ‘post racial’ discouragement under Obama?” or “Is structural racism taught or is it even possible to do so?” remain present in the resurgence of the debate on teaching history. Teaching has evolved from the “culture wars of the 1990s” until the present day where a more inclusive perspective is presented, and systemic racism has gained a place in the classroom. French students were questioned about what they learned about African Americans in their lessons as young students, and the answers reflected a very brief and reduced version of this history, with examples such as: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the fight to abolish slavery. These students were then asked what they would have changed in their experiences, and they responded that they would have preferred to have multiple perspectives of African Americans provided and information about their life “after slavery.” These responses show the limiting aspects of African American history that was taught, but also the interest and need for a more encompassing representation. The restrictions of what is taught on this subject have experienced a reawakening and have started to gain momentum. For example, laws are being instated that restrict teachers and their way of factually teaching these historical events.

## **I. Teaching History in the United States**

To understand and unpack this quarrel, one must understand what is being discussed, who is concerned, when these events took place, and why is it being discussed. Education is a tool that can be distorted by those who, notably the government, implement restrictions on what is being taught or the way that something is taught in the education system. Factors such as the censorship of teachers, their teaching methods, and their resources restrict the scope of what is being presented and taught to the student. It is worth analyzing what topics have been included, or not, in school curriculum, and why it might pose a problem to the learner trying to acquire historical and cultural knowledge. In recent years in the United States, the debate revolving around the teaching of African American history topics has come to the foreground once again. These sort of inclusive history debates are not new to the education system, nor the government. Yet, there has been another light shed onto this topic with recent cultural and historical events facing potential censorship in the classroom. It is therefore essential to understand the issues raised by this debate and to consider future solutions that take past decisions into account to create a better learning environment for future generations, nationally and internationally.

### ***1.1 History and Polarization***

To better understand why teaching an inclusive history in the American education system has, controversially, had another upheaval in recent news, it is necessary to comprehend the key historical events that took place throughout United States' history from its very conception. In addition to this, it is also important to take note of what has re-sparked this debate, where this problem is taking more precedence geographically and why, and what measures have been put in place to find a common ground that allows room for a more inclusive history to be represented.

Firstly, the very beginning of the United States' history has recently been put into question. July 4th, 1776 has been known as the birthday of the United States since the Declaration of Independence was written. However, this date is now being put into question notably after *The New York Times* created a project in August 2019, which marked the 400th anniversary of the forced immigration of slaves to present-day Virginia. This project is called the "1619 Project," which puts the American perspective on the history of the United States into question. It questions what July 4th, Independence Day and the official birthday, means as well as calls for an understanding of the events of the past and their long-lasting effects on the present. How would the people's perspective of United States history change if they were to include and consider the events leading up to this particular day? What would this mean to the

people to include another facet in United States' history? What does this change reflect in whose story has been, or has not been, included in history and passed down to future American generations? Further questions could follow such as: who created the United States? Who is, or could be, considered as a Founding Father of the United States, and what are the qualifications to be one? This new perspective on exactly when the United States was considered its own independent country allows further analysis into the events that occurred throughout its history. "The project helped push scholarly conversations about the impact of racism on U.S. History into the mainstream" Waxman wrote in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Its history from a 1776 perspective puts more detail, perspective, and value on the history of its white population and the success of the victor breaking away from its imperial power. Changing the perspective to a 1619 standpoint allows further analysis and asks why the story of, notably, African Americans was not included and for what purpose.

With these recent events in mind, the key details presented by *TIME* magazine's Olivia B. Waxman will aid in better understanding the unfolding of such historical events and the effects. Waxman lists different reference points throughout history such as: "John Burk's three-volume history of Virginia, [...] largely left out slavery;" "the United Daughters of the Confederacy [...] propagating the 'Lost Cause'" stating the South "fought nobly for states' rights, not for slavery;" inciting loyalty to the nation in schools through textbooks during World War I; the prohibition of slander towards the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s in Oregon; and calling again for loyalty to the nation during the red scares of communism during the 1930s and 1950s (Waxman, 2021). Throughout the various events listed, it can be seen that conservative fear, or anger, to protect the legacy of the United States has long been used as a tool to create a one-sided history. The idea being that if nothing is done to stop these reforms and changes, schools will be used "to destroy American culture and traditions" as Republican Ronald Reagan stated in 1969 while serving as California's governor (Waxman, 2021). The intermingling of political views and how an individual perceives their nation intensifies and leads to further decisions on how future Americans will come to see their own country, starting with how their country and its history are taught and represented in the education system. History has been and is being used by politicians to call on critical thinking and to create a shared heritage. However, in the United States, the history of enslavement and white supremacy divides opinion. The reworking of what events are to be included in teaching certain historical events in the classroom feed racist and white supremacy anxiety.

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<sup>1</sup> Waxman, "'Critical Race Theory Is Simply the Latest Bogyman.' Inside the Fight Over What Kids Learn About America's History," 2.

In light of *The New York Times* 1619 Project, a divide was created between those who support including the historical events that took place from 1619 onward and those who value the traditional, patriotic perspective that has been in place for generations. In 2020, Trump created a counter committee entitled the 1776 Commission to “promote patriotic education” which was put to an end when Biden came to office (Waxman, 2021). Those who support the perspective that 1776 is the birth year of the United States also support the idea that “children shouldn’t be burdened with the past” (Waxman, 2021). However, those who favor the 1619 starting point understand what the arrival of the first Africans to the United States represents as the beginning of their contribution to the history of the nation. This point of view supports teaching children about past events and their impact on present-day society. This ideal of creating a more inclusive and prosperous future is echoed through the quote, “our understanding of the past is a key factor in how we envision our future” (Waxman, 2021). The American population has become increasingly politically polarized throughout the years leading up to the present day, and Donald Trump’s presidency saw this polarization at an all-time high. The debate between the 1776 and 1619 perspectives reflects the Republican Democratic divide. There tends to be a political influence on this subject as school curriculums are called into question; conservatives and liberals have long been at war in dealing with how future generations of Americans should be educated, specifically on which version of history is to be included in the classroom. During these debates, spanning over decades, the perspectives that Democrats and Republicans have on United States history tend to jar as they highlight different elements with different motivations and supporting reasons.

### ***1.2 The States Decide***

The analysis of the formalization of history education in American K-12 schools during the late 19th century, including the politicization of education, will aid in understanding the complications that arise in and out of the classroom. Decisions for schools and their curricula are not imposed on a federal level, because public education in the United States is mainly managed on a state and local level. The reason for this being that the United States’ Constitution did not include any mention of how education was to be managed. The 10th Amendment states that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution [...] are reserved to the states respectively.” Therefore, the states are in control of what is taught and how in the schools within their limits. Any further information from the federal government, such as subject standards, are suggestions made; therefore, their implementation in the classroom is not mandatory. However, while the role of the federal government in education is relatively non-

existent, patriotism has still been a foundational ideal to be included and fervently upheld in United States' classrooms.

The "Lost Cause" is one of the major examples that can be used when analyzing the influence of what is taught to students through textbooks and through common ideals. Referred to by United States' Southerners as "Southern Heritage," the Lost Cause aimed to rewrite the history of the South and defend the Southern way of life. As Vox states, this was done by instilling three aspects: the glorification of Confederate soldiers, the idea that enslaved people were happy, and that slavery was not the root cause of the Civil War (2017, 0:55). The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), founded in 1894, helped to move this initiation along as the UDC aimed to preserve confederate culture for future generations. The women that were a part of the UDC influenced the South by creating confederate memorials in prominent public places and working with children (Vox, 2017, 1:40). Through their work with children, they were able to instill the Southern ideals by only keeping textbooks that regarded the South positively or otherwise took them off the shelves saying they provided a representation that was "Unjust to the South," so as to not let Northern ideals creep in (Vox, 2017, 4:05). These textbooks underwent a strict screening process under A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books, and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges and Libraries written by Mildred Rutherford, that ensured teaching the "truths" of Confederate history. This was widely accepted by the UDC as well as the state, which, as stated previously, controls the educational system. This pamphlet was a "set of standards for what was acceptable in a history textbook" (Huffman, 2019). Rutherford was not only the author of this pamphlet, but she was also one of the most valued members of the Rutherford Committee where she held the role of historian. Her values supported the white South, slavery, as well as the Ku Klux Klan; these topics were to be passed down from generation to generation. As her values show, the history being fed to future school children had been taken solely from a pro-South, pro-Confederate point of view. This also stirred motion from the state to commence a ban on books that did not uphold these values and those similar. Huffman goes on to state that "many state commissions also allowed UDC members to attend their deliberative meetings to promote or criticize books" (2019). Furthermore, the UDC also created the Children of the Confederacy which passed down patriotic songs of the Confederacy as well as taught The Confederate Catechism, which held call and response facts about the Confederacy with a Lost Cause perspective that they were to learn by heart, according to Vox (2017, 5:09). To understand the point of view provided throughout this catechism, question number 13 serves as an example: "[13] How were the slaves treated? With great kindness and care in nearly all cases, a cruel master being rare, and lost the



respect of his neighbors if he treated his slaves badly.” (Branch Stone, 2020). The Children of the Confederacy was seen as a kind of after-school club where they could also pay visits to war veterans (Vox, 2017, 5:20). The influence of “Southern Heritage” in these textbooks lasted well into the 1970s. This is therefore a crucial issue that is raised when questioning the teaching of history, as it had been taught differently in the South. Can this instilled patriotism for a skewed history be changed and evolve to incorporate a more complete history, for example, including various perspectives and accounts of the same event to have a more global outlook of what took place for different groups of people? If so, how can this be achieved?

### ***1.3 The Centrality of Race***

With the large political divide between right and left-wing politicians, there is increasing polarization in the United States that adds fuel to the fire when debating teaching standards and concepts to be implemented in the classroom. Decisions made by politicians as well as by the state Board of Education tend to show the political leanings that influence the system based on what is voted on in the public education system. Therefore, this dominant divide between the two major political parties has impeded, and will continue to impede, certain propositions and resolutions presented for the educational system. The examples to be listed stem from a major turning point in the U.S. education system when schools became integrated to include both Black and white students in the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). Waxman also references the intensification of political interference in schools by providing references to 21st century debates that have taken place such as Title IX (protects students from sexual discrimination), Common Core (a set of academic standards promoted by the U.S. government), bathroom bills (rules that dictate how students who identify as transgender are allowed to use bathrooms), and finally the role of COVID-19 and its link to mask mandates, social distancing measures, and school closures (Waxman, 2021). These examples go to further show how political presence affects school policy.

Moreover, this historical and political climate background provides access to understanding the current debate on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and whether its instruction should be included in state curricula. Future and current school children in the United States will not receive an accurate version of history if race and racism are left out of the discussion. According to research conducted by the Southern Poverty Law center, “only 8% of high school seniors in 2018 could identify slavery as the primary cause of the Civil War.”<sup>2</sup> Waxman goes

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<sup>2</sup> Waxman, “‘Critical Race Theory Is Simply the Latest Bogyman.’ Inside the Fight Over What Kids Learn About America’s History,” 9.

on to quote Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, who has concluded that if students do not learn and understand that the reason certain racial inequalities exist today is because of racism, to what are they going to attribute these inequalities? Dr. Kendi states, for example, “[students are] going to conclude that those Black people must have less because they are less.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, leaving racism out as a possible contributor to inequalities creates further social division (Waxman, 2021). If the political climate over education intensifies further, students may receive a particular representation that may not include a mirror where they are able to see themselves through different people and events that are represented. Therefore, the importance of representation of oneself through a textbook or through a lesson will be lost for those students with black and brown skin; their history and identity will no longer be included in the narrative.

Rudine Sims Bishop developed the notions of “mirrors” and “windows” when discussing representation, of oneself or of others. “Mirrors refer to materials that make connections with students’ daily experiences, whereas windows expose students to and help them acknowledge and appreciate different contexts and cultures” (Armstrong, 2022). Mirrors instill a sense of connection to what is taking place during the lesson to a student’s personal life; this sparks a more engaged and positive environment for that student. Moreover, mirrors of one student can serve as a window to another which incites “value learning about people who have different circumstances, perspectives, and cultures,” says Armstrong (2022). These representations are not just limited to race or ethnicity but should also be extended to include gender and disabilities. According to a recent report by Stuart Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo, diversity “leads to improved cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem solving” (2016). Which furthermore confirms the idea that the inclusiveness of various representations does not just benefit the student in the classroom, but that it also helps to shape and create a future citizen of society, where in their adult life they will encounter people from various backgrounds.

Moreover, as Critical Race Theory deals with confronting and comprehending systemic racism in United States’ institutions, those who have a 1776 or 1619 historical perspective tend to fall in favor for or against including this aspect in education. However, Waxman underlines that “actual critical race theory is rarely taught below the graduate level. Yet educators [...] are

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<sup>3</sup> Waxman, “‘Critical Race Theory Is Simply the Latest Bogyman.’ Inside the Fight Over What Kids Learn About America’s History,” 9.

under fire for their increasing efforts to ensure schools teach a more diverse curriculum, with an emphasis on equity” (2021). This is due to the fact that a large part of the American public has misunderstood what CRT actually represents. As stated previously, CRT is “an approach to studying U.S. policies and institutions that is most often taught in law schools” and explores “how race and racism have shaped American law and society” (Borter, 2021). According to a national poll conducted by Reuters/Ipsos in July 2021, many misunderstandings about CRT held by the American public were revealed. For example, “twenty-two percent of those who said they were familiar with Critical Race Theory also think it is taught in most public high schools.” Furthermore, “thirty-three percent believe it ‘says that white people are inherently bad or evil’ or that ‘discriminating against white people is the only way to achieve equality’” (Kahn, 2021). However, it is also stated that “a bipartisan majority of Americans should learn about slavery and racism in America.”

This debate can also be seen from a geographical standpoint with the North South divide of the United States. This dates to the Civil War era, and its repercussions as slavery was one of the main causes of the war. This goes to show that this conflict still lingers amongst American politics today when considering how the past of the United States should be represented. Therefore, it is also worth reviewing which states were a part of the Confederacy, which ones were not, and which ones were on the border of it, to better understand the current debate on which states are or are not banning CRT in their school system. The Confederacy included the states of: Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia; the Border States included: Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri (*Facts*, 2021).

As of 2022, the following states have banned Critical Race Theory: Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Tennessee ([Annex 1](#)). Moreover, there are several states that are motioning to sign legislation that prohibits the teaching of CRT or are implementing school policies to do so; those states are: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (*States That Have Banned Critical Race Theory 2022*). For example, the current law in Tennessee “prohibits educators from including or promoting certain concepts. Those include teaching that one race [...] is inherently superior to another, ascribing character traits, values, moral or ethical codes to a specific race [...]; that the United States is fundamentally racist [...] or that meritocracy is inherently racist” (Mangrum, 2021). Reuters states that those who are in favor of banning the teaching of CRT in schools aim to protect students “from what they consider to be a divisive ideology and a

distortion of history” (Kahn, 2021). While those states who are aiming to implement bans or have currently banned CRT largely represent the states previously belonging to the Confederacy, there are also states from historically Democratic backgrounds that are envisioning a restriction on how race is taught in the education system.

While it is important to take in the historical political backgrounds of the states, it is equally important to take into consideration their current political leanings, whether red or blue. The states, as listed previously, voting in favor of the ban on CRT have varying current political stances as per the results of the 2020 United States presidential election, shown in map format ([Annex 2](#)). States that had electoral votes favoring the Republican party were Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia. While states that had electoral votes favoring the Democratic party were Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin. It is also worth noting that four out of the six states (Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) that voted for the Democratic party in the 2020 presidential election were also labeled swing states, according to the website *USAFacts*. Being labeled a swing state signifies the fact that the state’s political leaning tends to vary from election to election.

#### ***1.4 Resisting State Restrictions in Teaching***

Due to state restrictions on what can be taught in classrooms or what types of textbooks can be provided based on political decisions, certain initiatives such as Rethinking Schools, the Zinn Education Project, and the most recent one, the 1619 Project in Schools developed by the Pulitzer Center, have been created as outlets to provide a more fact-based, inclusive version of history accessible to all educators and students. Starting the movement was Rethinking Schools, which was created in 1986 in Milwaukee, one of the most segregated cities in the United States, after education activists sought to introduce a more inclusive history as they remarked that the school curriculum was ridden with racial bias and conservative values. Since their conception in 1986, their magazine has been distributed for free in Milwaukee schools and has been continuously in print to allow for different voices to be heard. Their website states that their “magazine, books, resources, and projects promote equity and racial justice in the classroom. [They] encourage grassroots efforts in [their] schools and communities to enhance the learning and well-being of [their] children, and to build broad democratic movements for social (...) justice” (*Our History*, 2020).

Since 2008, two non-profit organizations, Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, have organized the Zinn Education Project which focuses on “teaching people’s

history.” This project is named after and initiated by historian, professor, and activist Howard Zinn whose book *A People’s History of the United States* sought to “emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements shaping history” (*About: Zinn education project: Teaching people's history*, 2022). This initiative provides “access to classroom-tested ‘people’s history’ teaching materials, student friendly articles, and recommendations for social justice books and films.”<sup>4</sup> These teaching materials found on the website can be filtered by time period, theme, resource type, as well as grade level. Amongst their campaigns proposed, two are devoted to Teaching Reconstruction and Teaching for Black Lives, which have individual pages on the site that discuss the campaign, why it is important, lessons that can be implemented, and more.

Since the creation of the 1619 Project by *The New York Times*, the Pulitzer Center has also taken the initiative to incorporate this perspective in classrooms by providing “curriculums, guides and activities for students developed by the Pulitzer Center” for free. Its aim is to “challenge historical narratives, redefine national memory and build a better world.” These resources can be found through grade level, format (such as lesson, unit, etc.), state, or subject. These free-to-access resources allow the inclusion of Black history in the United States to be highlighted. These databases challenge the status-quo of standardized education and provide an alternate way to include a multi-faceted history.

Therefore, the issues raised by these facts will also allow for a deeper understanding of what the limitations or the difficulties of implementation are in the education system. As this conflict consists of multiple aspects, such as historical, geographical, and political, there is not a direct, simple solution that can be offered. It is then necessary to have a better understanding of the problem by looking at it from various perspectives, notably who is concerned and how and what are possible solutions to these problems.

### ***1.5 The Importance of Inclusivity – in the US and Abroad***

While there is debate on what should be taught in the United States’ education system, this conflict further extends to the way that this history is taught on an international level, notably in France. It is worth questioning whether the French education system takes the framework of how African American history is taught in the United States when creating its own curriculum, or whether France is critical of these historical norms. These methods concern the textbooks and resources being used in the classroom. Students receive information on

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<sup>4</sup> “Home,” <https://rethinkingschools.org/>.

African American history from their teachers, which can be restricted through the school's program or through the textbooks provided.

The choices that are made and installed into the school curriculum have an influence on the culture of the population, as it guides and informs students to think in a specific way about this aspect of history. Resources such as Zinn Education and Rethinking Schools are providing alternative viewpoints on how history has been discussed to previous generations and what adaptations can be made to have a more inclusive and thorough presentation of history today. Providing and integrating perspectives from people of various backgrounds into lessons allows for the inclusion of supporting information to further the understanding of this topic. There may also be cultural references that can be integrated to have a deeper understanding of the topic at hand.

The question of the inclusivity of history has long been a problem of debate for teachers and governments alike. "One of the peculiarities of today's history wars is that those who believe that particularistic studies of [...] African Americans [...] will balkanize America do not reflect on whether groups that have been ignored, demeaned or marginalized can be expected to feel part of the *unum* when they are not counted among the *pluribus*" (Nash et al., p. 102). Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the way that the teaching of the *pluribus* reflects the *unum*. To provide a more multifaceted perspective, lessons can be transformed into more enriched narratives by including different voices that would normally be unvoiced in a traditional take on history. The issue that comes to light is whose voices are to be included as this is a choice that must be made. However, for example, February, which is Black History Month in the United States, can also be a time to reinforce and focus on a deepening of African American history, but teaching African American history should not be confined to just one month. As Plato observed, "Those who tell the stories also hold the power" (Nash et al., p. 23). This statement is highly reflected in the events that have been chosen to be represented in the classroom and why the method of teaching African American history is being questioned today to decolonize the education system by unearthing the systemic racism that exists.

Another fear that has been voiced and explained in Waxman's article is that white Americans "fear that they are going to be treated how people treat marginalized groups" (2021). This links directly to the "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes" exercise by Jane Elliott, a world-renowned educator and diversity trainer. This exercise that she states she learned from Adolf Hitler results with blue-eyed people being treated unfairly just based on their eye color and is used to highlight the prejudice that exists every day for African Americans in the United States because

of their skin color. Elliott has conducted this exercise with all ages from children to adults; one of her most notable moments was on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1992. During the end of the program, the audience gave their feedback on the exercise and their experience being a brown- or blue-eyed person. Elliott takes this moment to ask the audience if the white audience would want to switch places with those who are Black, to which they respond no. This, she says, goes to show that there is a problem of discrimination that continues to exist, and that white people need to realize that they do not live the same reality that people of color do. While this event underlines the stark reality for those who have different skin color and the way that they are treated by society, it also highlights the fear that the majority of people with white skin have when realizing that they could be treated with the prejudice that those with dark skin are subjected to. While the inclusive historical narrative is being fought for in the United States' education system, there is a fear that the narrative of those with white skin will cease to exist and that it will be overtaken by those of other backgrounds. However, the goal of this exercise is not to erase the white narrative and replace it with other backgrounds. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students, of all backgrounds, to experience what discrimination feels like as well as see the effects of what discrimination can do to people. For those whose narrative takes precedence, it allows these students to understand the difficulties that another student might be facing in their daily life to create an empathetic, safe space for all students. According to PBS, students that were placed in the group that was made to feel inferior based on their eye color showed a drop in performance on their schoolwork (2003). This goes to show that students who are not represented and/or receive a negative, one-sided representation suffer because of it. This may not only be reflected in coursework but also in the development of their socio-emotional behaviors. This suffering experienced as a student, therefore, could create a long-lasting impact well into their adult lives and could affect how they construct themselves as active citizens in society. This teaches the students a social lesson on the impact of discrimination and misrepresentation inside and outside of the classroom.

These issues call to light the difficulties that impede the advancement and resolution of the issue of inclusive history and its establishment in the education system. It is therefore also worth reviewing different theories from specialists in the fields of education, racism, and anti-racism, analyzing how African American historical events are represented in French textbooks, and analyzing and critiquing an inclusive unit. This will lead to further analysis on how the conflict that is taking place in the country pans out on an international level.

## **II. How can the traditional method of teaching English change to be more inclusive**

For a teacher to change the traditional method of teaching English to make it more inclusive, theoretical readings on education, racism, and anti-racism prove to be an essential foundation, in order to evoke pertinent information that will lead to the progress of potential ideas and concepts that would be effective in the classroom. This section will discuss several important figures in these fields and their philosophies regarding the subjects previously mentioned. This list includes Ronald Takaki, Howard Zinn, Gary B. Nash, Robin DiAngelo, and Ibram X. Kendi. Then, the presentation of African Americans in French textbooks will allow for further analysis of what is included in this history at an international level. To better understand the evolution of the textbooks used in English classrooms in France, recent textbooks will be compared with textbooks from the turn of the century. It is worth questioning what changes have been made over the years and why. What are the possible consequences that could arise from these changes? To achieve this, the choice and reasoning for the textbooks selected as well as the possible risks that might arise from the use of these textbooks in the classroom will be discussed. Lastly, a critical analysis of a teaching plan for social justice by Zinn Education will be conducted with these theories and findings in mind.

### ***II.1 Theoretical Readings***

#### **Reynaud-Paligot**

Reynaud-Paligot (2006) highlighted that geography textbooks from the late 17th century to the mid 18th century in France placed emphasis on the “white race” being the most perfect, whereas the “black race” was considered to be the most inferior and uncivilized of all. These categorizations were placed on the society of each race as well as their physical features which interpreted their intelligence and the incapacity of assimilation. This observation links to Fassin’s statement that racial discriminations can be traced back as far as social groups and how they were treated by French society at the time, as these discriminations were supposedly founded on differences that were natural and based on one’s origins (2002). These two statements about the historical foundation of racism through society’s actions and thoughts as well as transmitted through textbooks shows the deep implementation of difference between social groups in French society. Fassin also notes that French society has ignored and even denied that foreigners and French people with a foreign origin have faced differential treatment (Fassin, 2002). This rejection of the reality of what those deemed as others face guards this social hierarchy where those who do not fear discrimination are not concerned with the other groups who do, that are situated lower on the social ladder.



### Ronald Takaki

Ronald Takaki was a professor at University of California, Berkeley and the author of many books, notably *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993). He is also credited with founding ethnic studies. Takaki was a pioneer in this multicultural field of education and sought to uncover the hidden histories of the United States that found themselves hidden behind the white narrative of American history. He valued the importance of the multicultural aspects of United States history and strived for these narratives to be included and highlighted in the traditional Eurocentric model provided at the time. In a lecture of his given at the University of Washington in 2002, Takaki reveals the “master narrative” of American history, which is the erroneous idea that the United States was settled by white, European people (UW Office of Public Lectures, 2020, 19:36). He continues by asking the question “How do we know we know what we know?” which urges the questioning of the master narrative and how and why it came to be (UW Office of Public Lectures, 2020, 23:18). Takaki tackles this notion of whose perspective of history is told and why, to encourage people to think about which narrative takes precedence and how that diminishes the other contributing narratives of minorities in the United States. When discussing the history of the United States and the perspective from which its history is told, the revolutionary works of Takaki allowed other similar thinkers to also take the stage such as Howard Zinn.

### Howard Zinn

Howard Zinn was an American historian, professor, and activist who wrote *A People's History of the United States* (2015) which emphasizes the role of everyday people in the way that history evolves and progresses and questions the traditional teaching method of history. In a speech addressed to teachers at the National Conference for the Social Studies (NCSS) conference held in 2008, Zinn brought several themes into the foreground, specifically: thinking outside of the box, conflicting interests throughout U.S. History, and American exceptionalism (ZinnEdProject, 2014). The first theme, thinking outside of the box, directly deals with the important role teachers have in broadening their students' perspective of the world. Zinn evokes the idea that if students do not learn how to become critical thinkers and question the world as they know it today, they will not be able to change the injustices that exist to progress and create a better future for themselves.

Secondly, he discusses the theme of conflicting interests throughout U.S. history, and how, contrary to what Americans have been taught to believe, not everyone has the same

interests. This is a recurring theme in U.S. history which is to be noted as it provides a realistic representation of the hierarchies of past and present and how these divided interests have had consequences that have persisted until present day. For example, Zinn mentions the class conflict that existed at the time of the Revolutionary War and how that gave way to a constitution favoring the interests of the upper classes. Thirdly, the concept of “American exceptionalism” is discussed which elaborates on the idea that not only are Americans taught that the United States is unique but that it is also better than all of its competitors. It creates a warped mindset for U.S. citizens as well as citizens of foreign nations. Zinn insists on the fact that an honest perspective of the United States is necessary to better understand it from a domestic and foreign point of view and to better situate its place in history. This was the inspiration for Howard Zinn to write his book *A People’s History of the United States* (2015), which then inspired the Zinn Education Project: Teaching People’s History. According to the Zinn Education Project’s website, the reason for teaching a people’s history is to see a clearer version of the past, so that a clearer version of the present can be seen and understood to best improve the present for a better future (Zinn Education Project). Zinn argued that every day, ordinary people did not receive enough attention in the traditional method of teaching history, and in forgetting these people, one loses sight of a more complete picture of these peoples’ emotions that sparked actions to change the world into what we know today, which reiterates the work constructed by Takaki.

### Bill Bigelow

Bill Bigelow is a retired social studies teacher that now works with the *Rethinking Schools* magazine and with the Zinn Education Project. Highlighted on the *Americans Who Tell the Truth* website, which is an initiative to highlight figures who speak out against issues in society through art, Bigelow’s methods of teaching are referenced to inspire change in the traditional method of teaching history. Bigelow’s goal with teaching historical facts is to bring them to life so that students can see that choices made by people construct the facts learned today. However, he also stresses that the conditions that these choices were made in also are a large factor in how and why certain events took place in the way that they did. As Zinn and Takaki fought to fight the “master narrative,” Bigelow also encourages an outlook on history that does not simply rely on the perspective of “great [white] men.” Bigelow also plays a role in writing and editing school curricula so that this point of view is spread to all the people who factored in to creating history. One way that he proposes to implement this in the classroom is through role play activities where students can embody people from the past in various

situations to deepen their understanding of the choices made at the time. As Bigelow is quoted on the website, “Our job is to excite students about the world, to help them see the role that they can play in making society more equal and more just, to express their ideas powerfully, to see that social studies is about real people’s lives.”

### Gary B. Nash

Gary B. Nash is another important figure when discussing the changes in the traditional teaching method in regard to the culture wars of the 1990s in the United States. While writing the “National Standards for United States History,” his team and he aimed to encourage teachers to stray from the memorization of important people, places, and dates with the idea that students would be able to see themselves as a functioning and participating cog in history, no matter their future career (Risen, 2021). This concept echoes Howard Zinn as it aims to render students more aware of the idea that history is not only the main historical figures represented in traditional teaching methods. In *History on Trial*, co-written by Nash, this point is driven further through the quote, “Hence, our nation’s story is incomplete—and therefore distorted—if we do not show how social, political, and religious movements changed as wealthy and powerful elites persuaded and enlisted ordinary people and how at the same time ordinary people pushed forwards their own agendas in ways that influenced and sometimes displaced leaders” (Nash et al., 2000, p. 80).

However, the goal of his critiques on not including everyday people into the major historical events was to assert that every person counts and that every person strives to make the country a better place. This theme, Risen points out, is shown through his works, notably “Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America” (1974) which “looked at the colonial era through the eyes of Native Americans, working-class whites, and free and enslaved Black people” (2021). This emphasis of the fact that every person’s experience plays a role in the larger fabric of history begins at the educational level, where students learn the importance of their role as citizens and take responsibility in their society (Risen, 2021). This instruction allows students to learn how to adapt to a world that is constantly evolving and restructuring itself economically, politically, and environmentally (Nash et al., 2000, p. 94). Furthermore, multiculturalism is an additional piece to be added to this learning method as it creates the individual identity of each citizen that plays a national, and international, role, with “individual upbringing, religion, gender, social status, family allegiance, schooling, sexual preferences, and more.”

### Robin DiAngelo

Robin DiAngelo has coined the term “white fragility” which is what she explains are the multiple types of defensive reactions that white people display when their stances or points of view regarding race are questioned. In 2018, DiAngelo held an interview with Mary Jo Madda from EdSurge, a website that “reports on the people, ideas, and tools shaping the future of learning,” to discuss the place of white fragility in the education field, and how it affects teachers and students alike. During this interview, DiAngelo highlights that the K-12 education system in the United States is mainly dominated by white, female teachers, notably from a segregated background. She explains that while these teachers have the seemingly positive intention of being “colorblind” - the notion that skin color should not affect how an individual is treated - to their students, it creates injustice as it does not address the issue of race in the classroom. This is then masked and creates problems for students in their school career and afterwards. She proposes that in order to comprehend and move past white fragility, teachers (as well as all individuals, in general) should ask themselves why they have these defensive reactions when their perspective on race is put into question and build a bond with parents or students who are asking these questions in order to understand what they can do in order to effectively respond to the needs that are not being met in the classroom.

Outside of the educational sphere, DiAngelo also discusses how white fragility affects most of the everyday lives of white people and how they benefit from a system that is segregated, without mentioning the terms “black” and “white” explicitly. DiAngelo mentions that white people enjoy a sense of overall racial belonging, as in every part of culture in U.S. society white people are included. This is reflected through cultural heroes, beauty standards, textbooks, etc. (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 62). These are narratives and representations worth questioning as to why there is such a lack of comfortability, a defensive reaction, that arises when racism is used in terms of “black” and “white.”

Furthermore, DiAngelo extends her response on racism to counter argue those who might claim that her teachings reflect “reverse racism,” what is known as being racist against white people. As stated in the interview, she wants white people to recognize that “they have inherently racist perspectives based on being socialized in a society in which racism is the bedrock, and [...] [try] to figure out how it manifests, rather than if” (Madda, 2018). By white people acknowledging their privilege, a proactive approach can be taken to unlearn the culture that was taught through generations. In addition to questioning oneself as a white person, it is also important to put into consideration one’s stance on racism, “Am I not a racist?” or “Am I an anti-racist?” which then introduces the philosophy of antiracism by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi.

Ibram X. Kendi

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi has conducted extensive work on racism, including its conception, how it works, how it has recreated itself time and time again, and what its consequences are that persist until present day. He has written several books, most notably *How to Be an Antiracist* written in 2019 that tackles the idea of how the opposite of being “racist” is not being “not racist” but being “anti-racist.” With this background on racism, Dr. Kendi heavily encourages people to become anti-racist. Defining oneself as an anti-racist demonstrates that there is no neutrality when the subject of racism presents itself. Whereas the term “not racist” leaves ground for neutrality, the term “anti-racist” actively fights against the inequities present in society that persist. It is important for citizens to take on a standpoint that points out the consequences of racism and seek out solutions that will deconstruct what has created this divisive society. Furthermore, as stated previously, Dr. Kendi also supports that children as students should be informed about racism to comprehend the various situations that people from different backgrounds experience. Some people believe that children are too young to learn about racism as it is an abstract and complex topic to understand at a young age. However, Dr. Kendi believes that by raising children to be anti-racist and informing them about the social inquiries that exist around them they will be better able to protect themselves and others from racism. If children, as future citizens and adults, are not educated to become anti-racist, then the policies that are currently in place will be less likely to be thought about critically and questioned to create a more inclusive and equitable future society. One of the goals of the educational system today is to raise children to be critical thinkers of their current society to find solutions for a better future.

Furthermore, Dr. Kendi reiterates that race is a power construct as positive and negative attributes have been given to certain races to justify the consequences of racism. This is a concept that has been utilized through generations to justify the implication of a hierarchy based on those who hold power. Dr. Kendi explains that if we prepare children to understand that no skin color has a right or wrong aspect to it, then they will be able to better understand the categories that people have been put in unjustly, based on this specific characteristic of skin color. Through this method of teaching racism and how to be an anti-racist, students will learn how to spot unjust flaws in society and be encouraged to change them.

## ***II.2 Presentation of the English textbooks chosen***

The English textbooks that have been chosen are all used at the *terminale* level, which is the last year in secondary education in France. The textbooks that have been chosen fall into two categories: dating pre-2010 and dating from 2010 to present day.

### *Recent English Textbooks Dating from 2016-2020*

The four English textbooks from the French education system are entitled: *Blockbuster* (2019), *Diversity* (2016), *Fireworks* (2020), and *Seasons* (2020). These textbooks were chosen as their publication dates are within the last 10 years and are still being used in classrooms throughout France. Each of these textbooks provides a unit or subunit that presents and discusses certain aspects of African American history for students to learn about. Due to their recent publication dates, these textbooks may include historical events or concepts that have taken place within the past 20 years, for example the Black Lives Matter Movement, how the use of the term “African American” is evolving, movies such as *Black Panther*, etc. By providing a modern-day outlook with their inclusiveness of historical events that are not limited to the Civil Rights Movement and the slave trade, these textbooks allow students to see that African American history is a continuous history that continues to progress and evolve and is not confined to these umbrella themes which, while important, have been consistently taught.

### *English Textbooks Pre-Dating 2010*

The English textbooks pre-dating 2010 from the French education system are entitled: *Go for English* (1995), *New Flying Colours* (1997), *Looking Forward* (2003), and *Broad Ways* (2005). This choice of textbooks was in part to have the possibility to see the evolution of textbooks across several years around the turn of the 21st century. With a timespan of 10 years between the editions chosen, this permits an incremental perspective on how the textbooks were adapted, or not, to the times in which they were written. While these textbooks do have a prominent presence of notable historical aspects relevant to the African American community, there is also a call to action for the students to take part in a changing society of accepting and understanding each other’s differences as well as finding possible solutions to learn from the past so that the tragic events detailed in the units do not repeat themselves.

## ***II.3 Analysis of English textbooks***

To better understand the representation of African Americans in French textbooks, I have chosen to focus on the class of *terminale*, the last year of secondary education, and analyze the recent and older English textbooks at this level. This analysis of textbooks from different

points in time in recent history will allow the evolution of what is being taught to students in English classes to be seen.

### Recent English Textbooks Dating from 2016-2020

Regarding recent English textbooks in France, I have chosen four textbooks dating from 2016 to 2020 to analyze how they portray African American history.

In the *Blockbuster* (2019) textbook, Unit 14 “USA in black and white” is the first unit of *axe 7*, Diversity and Inclusion. The opening page of the unit asks how African Americans are considered and represented today in the United States. It asks the students to brainstorm the events that represent the relationship between Black and white people in the United States, then to use a scene from Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* and reflect with both in mind. The unit continues with discussing famous Black athletes and the showing of a Nike video advertisement called “Equals Everywhere” (2017). The students are asked to reflect on the video, with questions in mind such as “What is its message?” and “Is it effective?” The third section of the unit focuses on the movie *Black Panther* which asks the students to discuss the film, whether they have seen it or not, to find information from the article provided, and to debate whether Black artists get enough recognition in today’s American society. The last section discusses the Mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, with the use of an audio clip from a radio program. The students are asked to discuss why she is a role model as an African American political figure.

The focus of Unit 3 in *Diversity*, a textbook published in 2016, is “a nation of immigrants” which discusses how immigrants from different backgrounds have influenced the United States and each other. Unit 3 contains what is called an “Advanced File,” which is a unit extension that provides more information at the end of the unit. The “Advanced File” for Unit 3 discusses “African-American identities” and what this has come to mean today. This extension provides information on which term, Black American or African American, should be used and, depending on context, why. There is also a map which breaks down the different areas all around the world from which Black immigrants came. The concept of American Africans is also discussed and how they differ from those who descend from enslavement, known as African Americans. Moreover, there is also a section devoted to Africanness in America which provides an insight on how those who have immigrated to the United States from Africa live. Each section of the unit extension is based on different types of accounts, such as articles, videos, or books. It calls into question how African Americans, either descendants of enslaved people or those who immigrated for other reasons not through the force of slavery,

view themselves in the United States, how they refer to themselves (which terms they use), and what similarities and differences show.

In the *Fireworks* (2020) textbook, Unit 13 “Black Lives Matter” is the second unit of *axe 7*, Diversity and Inclusion. This unit asks students to think about how public protests have helped African Americans fight for and gain their rights. The opening of the unit provides a link between Barack Obama, the first African American President of the United States, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the African American Civil Rights Activist, to provide a broad scope on how African Americans have been treated from the past until the present. The first section is “Making History” which provides a timeline of some famous African Americans and their contribution to US history from 1940 until the present day. Students are asked to make connections between different figures from various points in history, to choose the person and achievement that is most remarkable to them, and to express why these events are important. The second section, “The Fight for Social Justice,” presents a photo from a sit-in during the Civil Rights Movement. Then, an activity accompanied by a video asks students to discuss the backgrounds and actions of the people in the video, why segregation was implemented in the South, and what different ways were used to fight against segregation. Students are then asked to reflect on the evolution since the Civil Rights Movement. Section 3, “A Silence that Speaks Volumes,” discusses how athletes have used gestures to protest inequality and respond by providing their reactions and opinions about these gestures as well as their effectiveness. Section 4 entitled “An Unfulfilled Dream?” provides songs so that students can listen and find the difficulties faced by African Americans, historically and continuing to the present day. Section 5 entitled “Movie Corner” provides a list of movies for students to discover and understand their link to African American history. Students are also asked to compare the movies’ similarities and differences. The list of movies provided date from 2012 to 2019, including motion pictures such as *Hidden Figures* (2016) by Theodore Melfi and *I Am Not Your Negro* (2017) by Raoul Peck.

In the *Seasons* (2020) textbook, African American history is brought to light under the *axe* of Art and Power in the 6th unit. The question of the unit is: “How can art be a powerful tool in the fight against slavery and its legacy?” The unit begins with a “Cultural Background” section that tests students’ knowledge of slavery in America, choosing whether a statement about slavery is true or false, an activity about the triangular slave trade, an explanation of what the “Middle Passage” was, and what plantation life was like. The first section discusses the auction of slaves, the second section discusses slave punishment, the third section discusses the aftermath of slavery with the song “Strange Fruit” sung by Billie Holiday, and the fourth section



discusses the aftermath of slavery through the movie *BlacKkKlansman*. Through art, such as song, film, and paintings, the struggles and history of the Black community are exposed through different media to answer the question of the unit. This requires another point of reflection for the students in how they view racism as they can see the emotions from the artists and the message that they convey through their work. It incites students to think about how racist acts can cause pain and suffering for others, and then asks them to reflect on how to create a different world by fighting against racism.

Focused on African American history across the four different textbooks, these units provide a very recent history starting from mostly from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s until present day. Considering this more recent history approach, these units are saturated with anti-racist messages through the activities provided that correspond with the people and events chosen. The activities provided ask students to reflect on these events deemed historical and how they relate and carry over to events that are currently occurring today and echoing the past. African American people with political, athletic, activist, and art backgrounds amongst others are represented to show the diversity of representation throughout the African American community as well as to highlight the difficulties and obstacles that they faced during their lifetimes. While the fourth textbook, *Seasons* (2020), is the only textbook that does not discuss African American history under the *axe* of Diversity and Inclusion, the utilization of the *axe* of Art and Power allows African American history to be looked at from a different angle.

#### English Textbooks Pre-Dating 2010

Regarding the English textbooks used in French classrooms at the *terminale* level pre-dating 2010, I have chosen a selection of four textbooks from 1995-2005. While a 10-year period might seem like a large span of time to cover, it will prove interesting to see how the textbooks written during this period are similar or different based on the evolution of the traditional teaching method and its proposed variants. Throughout these four textbooks, the units that represent African American history have been chosen to be analyzed to see what information has been included, or not, for students to learn.

In 1995, the textbook entitled *Go for English terminale* was published with a cover of a hand, light-skinned in color, dunking a basketball into a hoop. The second unit of the book's twelve units is entitled "The World's A Family." Underneath the title, the theme for the unit's project is provided: to promote tolerance. The warm-up activity provides drawings for the students to analyze. The students are asked to reflect on the actions of what the people in the drawing are doing and how their actions make the students feel as a viewer. The warm-up

activity is followed by a first “project task” which asks the students to give a talk on the topic “There is no biological basis for race.” A comprehension section is provided as activity with anticipation questions for the text as well as deciding if the statements are true or false based on a text entitled “Genes and Race” which supports the argument that there are no specific genes that correspond to one’s race. The second “project task” is then presented as “dramatising a scene of racial conflict.” In this section, several different texts are provided that discuss racial conflicts, such as in Rwanda, the Holocaust, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These various texts urge the students to contemplate and reflect on why certain people were discriminated against in the various ways mentioned. The third and final activity is introduced and concludes the unit. The students are asked to participate in a listening activity of an interview with Mother Teresa of Calcutta by filling in the missing words from the dialogue. Lastly, the unit’s project task is presented which asks the students “[to write] a letter to the press, about reducing intolerance” by including a racial conflict, why it is not acceptable, and a possible solution to resolve the problem.

The following textbook was published in 1997 and is entitled *New Flying Colors* where the unit “Racial Issues” is the ninth unit of thirteen. The unit begins with the use of Norman Rockwell’s *The problem we all live with* painting (1964) and asks students to describe the painting and its possible meanings and insinuations and to situate its date of creation in history and find to which events it corresponds. Then, a “warm-up” activity is presented over the span of two pages. These pages include a chronological timeline of several important historical dates regarding African American history in the United States from 1619 until, then, present day. Various types of graphs are also presented representing the disparities between Black and white communities; these graphs include: information on the median family income, information regarding “The Chatahoochee Study” which concerns the race of victims and defendants in murder cases, and information about murder cases where the death penalty was concerned. There is also a text box called “For the Culture Vulture” which describes cultural references such as “affirmative action,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its character, Uncle Tom. There are also three photos of African American figure heads (Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.) with a small description. Information regarding the Ku Klux Klan and Louisiana is also presented in the form of small texts. The warm-up section is completed with a review section containing three subsections: quiz, words, and analysis; this allows students to review the information presented. The next section is entitled “Black Nightmare” which includes a text from Malcolm X’s autobiography, an illustration (presumed to be of a member of the Ku Klux Klan) relating to the text, followed by questions that pertain to previewing, analysis, and words

used throughout the activity. The second section of the unit provides an excerpt from Kate Chopin's *Désirée's Baby* written in 1899, which provides an insight into plantation life. This excerpt is followed with a section that proposes questions on "compréhension compétence linguistique expression." The final section of the unit uses the song entitled "Strange Fruit" with an excerpt of the lyrics and is paired with an image of a white community attending a "Necktie Party" in Indiana in 1930. These two supports are used for students to make the connection to lynchings. This activity contains subsections that pose questions in subcategories: observing, listening, words, and analysis.

The third textbook chosen for this corpus is entitled *Looking Forward* and was published in 2003. Unit 6, in the 10-unit textbook, is entitled "Freedom" which focuses on key themes, notably guns in the United States and slavery. The unit commences with a section entitled "Getting Started" that focuses on "freedom versus responsibility" concentrating mainly on the topic of guns, gun violence, and school shootings. It is not until the third section of the unit, "Going Further," that slavery becomes a main theme. An excerpt from Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* (1993) is presented with following questions concerning the text, which discusses a slave auction. The painting *The American Slave Market* (1852) by Taylor is also included in this section which the students are to link to the text. Another text, which is an excerpt from *Simisola* (1994) by Ruth Rendell, provides an insight into Sojourner Truth's history, accompanied by a painting of her. This excerpt is also supported with questions the students are to use to better understand the text. This section also includes a listening activity of Martin Luther King Jr. 's *I Have a Dream* speech in 1963, accompanied with questions corresponding to the speech. This section is followed with another called "Focus On..." where a text entitled "Slavery: key dates and facts" is presented, discussing the Middle Passage, with an illustration of a convoy of African slaves dating from the 19th century. This text is supported with pertinent activities proposed to the students. The unit is concluded with a section called "Picture Gallery," where an 1863 engraving celebrating the emancipation of slaves following the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States is provided with questions that ask students to further analyze the details.

The final textbook analyzed pre-dating 2010 was published in 2005 and is entitled *Broad Ways*. The third unit of this 9-unit textbook is entitled "American Blues," which includes struggles that both African American and Native Americans have faced in the United States. The "Text Files 1" section provides an excerpt from *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) by Sherman Alexie, a Native American. The author uses Jimi Hendrix's rendition of the United States national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, to make a

connection with war and the importance of music. Further into the unit, the section “Spotlight” provides six subsections that highlight different aspects of songs of freedom, such as “Let My People Go” and “Rock Around the Clock,” following a chronological progression and evolution of the songs and music from the arrival of the first slaves in 1619 until the present year 2005. Following this section is “Text Files 2” which provides an extract from *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956) by Billie Holiday. This excerpt discusses aspects of Holiday’s personal life as well as the importance of the song *Strange Fruit*. The unit is concluded with “Reading Time” with an extract from *Home Across the Road* (1999), written by Nancy Peacock, which tells the story of a young slave in the year 1855. This text is not followed by any supporting questions or reflections.

Across these four textbooks, dating from 1995 to 2005, there are several concepts or themes that are echoed in today’s continued transformation of traditional teaching methods focusing on and evolving from the “master narrative,” where predominately white male figures are given the spotlight. It is interesting to note that certain information which is evoked in some textbooks, such as the year 1619 being included in the timeline of important dates in African American history, is not presented in others. It is equally important to reflect on why this choice might have been made. The main themes and historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Billie Holiday, and the Civil Rights Movement are all represented across the textbooks to some degree. Furthermore, African American history tends to be reduced to units with a sole focus on race and racism. Overall, the textbooks tend to have anti-racist overtones that urge students to think about what took place and reflect on why that might have happened. Facts are also represented to show statistics that support the claims being made on the social disparities that the different communities face based on their skin color.

#### ***II.4 Analyzing the content of the textbooks and their potential risks***

After having analyzed several English textbooks at the *terminale* level in the French education system that date from different points of time within the last 30 years, it is possible to notice the similarities and differences in the representation of African American history when comparing the two corpuses. With the main figureheads, such as Rosa Parks and Malcolm X, that have been consistently represented and taught in education, it is worth questioning why African Americans are, for the most part, systematically confined to the topics of race and racism, providing a generic, surface-level representation.

Regarding the textbooks dating from 2016 to 2020, there is a large emphasis on present-day representation of African Americans in United States culture. While it is important for

students to see this representation of African Americans, it is equally important for students to understand the progression of this representation through an analysis of several generations. For example, in the textbook *Fireworks* (2020), there is a “movie selection” section which includes a list of movies produced within the last 10 years. It would be interesting for students to not be limited to such a selection but to also include other movies from previous generations, for example *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). By allowing students to compare movies of past and present, this could open their perspective to the “white savior trope” where white people in a period piece help people of color to surpass their struggles. This narrative undermines the experience of the African American individual and their story by highlighting the story of the white character.

The history of African American people is therefore mostly limited to their oppression and mistreatment and is not extended to include the society, people, culture, and traditions of what it was like before and during the times African Americans were subject to oppression, slavery, segregation, etc. If textbooks do not value these cultures as such, it is easy for this exclusive, one-sided history to prevail. *La Haute Autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité (Halde)*, an independent administration created in 2004, conducted a research project in the same year to see how this quote was represented through stereotypes and discriminations across French textbooks. Van Eeckhout continues to explain that Black people are largely represented as poor and sick with the main reason for the presence being either slavery or segregation in the United States (2008). French students will, therefore, be inclined to think that “*pour les Français, Noir égale esclave*” (van Eeckhout, 2008). Textbooks may reflect an image of inferiority and passivity of non-Western people, so Westerners are valued as superior and active (Lanier, 2017). On the other hand, the analysis of recent English textbooks show the protest of African American people in recent United States’ history which helps to advance the representation of African Americans. However, protests of the present and of the past should be included to show students that their plight has been an ongoing process and not just a present-day concept. Furthermore, while the struggle represents an important part of African American history, it is also important to include successful African American figures, for example, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, African American women who were computer engineers for NASA, as well as historical events, such as the 1920s Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma, otherwise known as “Black Wall Street.”

To build one’s personal identity, it is important that there be a variety of representation in textbooks so that each student can envision themselves as a part of history. If a student does not see themselves in history and its events, or if they only see a negative and limited

representation, it can be discouraging or demotivating for the student to imagine themselves in a positive light in their own future. If the history of African American people is constructed a priori from oppression, how do students with Black ancestry see themselves? Lack of representation can lead a student to academic failure because they only see other representations of successful students who are not like them. For example, for students in France, "le choix des exemples, ou des prénoms dans les exercices [...] n'est pas anodin" and values the "good French student" which can lead those who do not fit this stereotypical category feeling discriminated against (van Eeckhout, 2008). Therefore, a passive form of discrimination is at play when certain communities are represented in a positive light which reinforces a negative stereotype of another. According to Bondy Blog, founded by *L'Hebdo* magazine to give writers from working-class areas a voice to share the narratives of everyday people whose voices are not heard, the author calls on textbook creators as follows: "arrêtons de faire de l'esclavage l'an zéro de l'histoire des Noirs. [...] Telle est la voie à suivre pour cesser de propager involontairement une culture de la défaite" (Matoiri, 2012). By acknowledging the richness of the history and culture of Black people before slavery, students will be able to have a more encompassing point of view that will include the successes, as well as hardships, of what Black people have faced throughout history.

From a psychological standpoint, the events and people represented in textbooks throughout a student's academic career also play a fundamental role in what is called "identity formation." "Identity/Identity formation is a person's mental representation of who he or she is."<sup>5</sup> The content and information that students are exposed to are vital to how they develop socially. One of the roles of teaching foreign languages in the French education system is to teach and to pass on the *valeurs de la République*, specifically "*le socle du respect d'autrui et de l'idéal de paix entres les peuples.*"<sup>6</sup> This, in turn, allows students to understand others and to help create a more inclusive and understanding environment by respecting others and their backgrounds. As alluded to previously, if students can identify through representations of people that are similar to them in the textbooks and resources at school, they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance and are therefore able to explore what their place in society is and/or could be, in relation to the larger group. Furthermore, UNESCO in their 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report regarding inclusion and education echoes this by stating that "identity signifies both the recognition of a person's individuality as portrayed to or perceived by others, and as an individual's membership of a group, society, or community created by language,

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<sup>5</sup> "Identity/Identity Formation."

<sup>6</sup> "Les valeurs de la République à l'école," 70.

kinship, lifestyles, beliefs, or other common ties.”<sup>7</sup> This highlights the importance of not only individual identity but also one’s social identity. While constructing one’s personal identity, individuals tend to relate themselves to their surroundings, their backgrounds, and more to better understand what their personal representation is in different situations and aspects. Read to Lead, a nonprofit aiming to help students in high poverty communities develop literacy and leadership skills, insists on providing multicultural content and materials used in the classroom so that students feel valued as well as feel more inclined to engage with the content that is related to them, their backgrounds, and their culture. If students do not have this representation in their school curriculum, then there is a higher risk of “lower engagement, participation, and ultimately achievement.”<sup>8</sup> Samuel goes on to include that, therefore, “increasing cultural diversity in classroom materials can be an effective way to boost student engagement and improve academic performance.”<sup>9</sup>

Marva Ferguson, assistant professor in social work and child studies from Mount Royal University in Canada, states that this “lack of representation is a contributor to systemic racism and a limiting factor in education.”<sup>10</sup> Systemic racism, or systemic discrimination, “has been defined as ‘practices or attitudes that have, whether by design or impact, the effect of limiting an individual’s or a group’s right to the opportunities generally available because of attributed rather than actual characteristics’” (*Systemic Discrimination- s.9(3)*, 2014). While school establishments and/or teachers may or may not be consciously choosing textbooks and resources that are representative of a more white, western society, this choice still negatively impacts the students who are not part of this demographic. Ferguson states that after having spoken with students about what they have noticed in their classrooms she learned that students from this demographic feel that their mostly white teaching staff use “‘majoritarian language,’ that is, from the perspective of white, western society with all of its privileged assumptions.”<sup>11</sup> This therefore reduces, and to some extent ignores, the perspective of the other cultures and peoples that play a role in history.

A more inclusive history for all students is the goal sought after to allow them to better identify and construct themselves in relation to history and their current lives. In addition, as Lord Christopher Hill stated: “History has to be rewritten in every generation because, although the past does not change, the present does; each generation asks new questions of the past, and

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<sup>7</sup> Fuchs, Otto, & Yu, “Textbooks and Inclusive Education - UNESCO Bibliothèque Numérique.”

<sup>8</sup> Samuel, “Why It’s Critical for Students to ‘See Themselves’ in Classroom Materials.”

<sup>9</sup> Samuel, “Why It’s Critical for Students to ‘See Themselves’ in Classroom Materials.”

<sup>10</sup> Glenn, “Lack of Representation in Education an Obstacle for BIPOC Students.”

<sup>11</sup> Glenn, “Lack of Representation in Education an Obstacle for BIPOC Students.”

finds new areas of sympathy as it re-lives different aspects of the experiences of its predecessors.”<sup>12</sup> To best aid and support students, two factors are vital. Firstly, that not only the teachers and instructors but also the school establishments make a conscious effort to incorporate an inclusive, multicultural curriculum and discourse throughout the student’s academic career. And, secondly, that there be a continuous reworking and updating of the historical narrative to reflect each new generation’s obstacles which will be seen and felt by students as they will be able to reflect on history presented from various perspectives and be able to situate themselves regarding their social and cultural background, so as to lead to a more positive outlook on their personal future in society. Therefore, this inclusive effort will encourage students to understand not only their personal situation, but it will also encourage them to think about the backgrounds of other people that they encounter, by upholding the *valeurs de la République*: “Respecter autrui, c’est respecter la liberté de l’autre, le considérer comme égal à soi en dignité, développer avec lui des relations de fraternité. C’est aussi respecter ses convictions politiques, philosophiques et religieuses, ce que permet la laïcité.”<sup>13</sup>

## ***II.5 Critical analysis of Zinn Education Project’s teaching plans for social justice***

### ***Description of the Unit Chosen for Critical Analysis***

Created by Bill Bigelow, the unit chosen for critical analysis is entitled “Teaching About Unsung Heroes - Encouraging students to appreciate those who fought for social justice” ([Annex 3](#)). This unit coincides with Howard Zinn’s emphasis on the important role that everyday citizens contribute to history. The goal of this unit is for students to realize that history consists of more than just famous figures, such as Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King, Jr., and that everyday people, whose names remain lesser known but are equally as important, played an important role in sparking change. The students’ understanding of the role of the everyday person allows students to make a connection with a wider range of historical figures in order to find mirrors of themselves and windows to others. So instead of asking them to present their person to the class, he asked them to embody the person and their background to create a personal narrative to be shared.

The first lesson allows the students to be introduced to the historical figures that will be discussed and presented throughout the unit. Each student will receive a small card with pertinent information relating to the person on it, such as: their name, the time period in which they lived, what they contributed to their movement, etc. In total, thirty-two historical figures

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<sup>12</sup> Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> “Les valeurs de la République à l’école,” 8.



are possible to be used in the lesson, such as John Brown, Nat Turner, and Jackie Robinson ([Annex 4](#)). Each student receives one card with the role description upon it. Students are allowed to exchange their cards if they choose to. The next part of the lesson is for the students to meet the other roles with the aid of a worksheet entitled “Racial and Gender Justice Hunt” ([Annex 5](#)). Some examples of the questions proposed are: “Worked against slavery or other forms of racism. What exactly did they do?” or “Believed it was necessary to use violence to achieve justice. What did they do?” The role of this worksheet is to help guide students to find specific pieces of information about the other people being presented in the lesson. Each of the eight questions must have a different person as the answer which ensures that students keep circulating to meet other figures.

Following the first lesson, the students review the information that they had learned about the various individuals that they had met during the activity. Afterwards, the students are presented with their final assignment (*tâche finale*), where they are given time to go to the library to begin their research. The final assignment is presented as such: “Choose an individual who stood up for racial or gender injustice. [...] The only requirements are that the person tried to make this a better place to live and significantly affected society. You may choose an individual (or group) who attended the ‘getting to know you’ gathering we did in class or come up with one of your own. If you choose one on your own, check with me first.”<sup>14</sup> The students are then informed that the presentation of their historical individual must be in the first person.

To continue their research, in- and out-of-class, the students are instructed to find out as much as possible about their person as well as finding stories from their lives. Several questions are also provided to help guide students in their findings, such as: “What did the person want to accomplish or change?” or “What meaning does this person’s life have for today?”<sup>15</sup> These questions are to also be answered completely as part of their final assignment. Students are then encouraged to share ideas on how they could present their person’s life, for example, through a dialogue or a letter. For homework, students are then asked to write two different introductions that they could use for their presentation.

During the third lesson, students are to read their introductions to each other in pairs. Introductions that students think are well done are asked to be shared with the class to help and inspire the other students by broadening their possibilities of the various ways to carry out their assignment. After this brainstorming, the unit proposition does not provide a fixed conclusion.

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<sup>14</sup> Zinn and Bigelow, “Unsung Heroes,” 6-7 ([Annex 3](#)).

<sup>15</sup> Zinn and Bigelow, “Unsung Heroes,” 7 ([Annex 3](#)).

### Why is it suitable for a French classroom?

The essence of the activities proposed throughout the unit (e.g., having a social exchange, completing research on a historical individual, and creating an account of a specific individual from the first person), employs the *perspective actionnelle*. The *Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECRL)* states: “La perspective privilégiée ici est [...] de type actionnel en ce qu’elle considère avant tout l’usager et l’apprenant d’une langue comme des acteurs sociaux ayant à accomplir des tâches (qui ne sont pas seulement langagières) dans des circonstances et un environnement donnés, à l’intérieur d’un domaine d’action particulier” (p. 15). This activity prepares students to be active participants in a given social situation where they are part of a dialogue with a goal of active listening and understanding. This supports students in their developing *compétences générales* and a *compétence à communiquer langagièremment*. This *compétence à communiquer langagièremment* is composed of several parts: a *composante linguistique*, a *composante sociolinguistique*, and a *composante pragmatique*.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this unit also plays an active role in upholding *le parcours citoyen*. By including different genders and backgrounds of the people chosen, students develop their understandings of themselves, others, and the coexistence of both.

Moreover, before analyzing and critiquing the various activities and aspects of the unit, it is first worth stating that this unit, to be used in an English classroom in France, would need to be adapted so that the elements proposed have the targeted language level for students at the *terminale* level in the *tronc commun*. These students have a target level in English of B1 when entering the *terminale* grade and are expected to have achieved the B2 level when leaving *lycée*. This unit allows students to partake in activities that propose practice and development in *compréhension orale*, *production orale*, *compréhension écrite*, and *production écrite*. The first activity proposed allows students to practice their *production orale en interaction* when exchanging with another student about their historical individual. The final assignment then proposes various forms of production which students can use to complete their assignment. After analysis of the final assignment in the following paragraphs, it would prove pertinent to identify a specific type of production so that students are able to adhere to a certain expectation that will evaluate their *production écrite*. A possibility for the *production écrite* could be a letter to a friend or a loved one as to allow for an informal tone of an intimate account of the student’s presentation of their historical figure. This letter would be 250 to 300 words in length where they are to use the preterit to describe their figure’s past.

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<sup>16</sup> “Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECRL),” 17.

While the activities proposed in the unit allow for an active engagement from the student, it would be beneficial for the unit to be introduced with an anticipation activity so that students are able to make deductions to find out what the unit might be about and the various topics that it may include. An example of an anticipation activity could be to write several African American historical figure's names on the board (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, etc.). Then, to ask the students to "Look and react" to find out what information they associate with these names (i.e., the Civil Rights Movement). This would allow for the students to reflect on what information they associate with African American history and contemplate other aspects that are not often taught in the classroom. For example, the question "Do you believe that African American history is limited to these people and events?" could be asked to the students. Their responses will allow for the introduction of the first activity which includes individuals from a variety of different backgrounds.

This unit presents valuable information regarding historical figures for students to see what an inclusive, multi-perspective history is. By including individuals from various backgrounds, for example regarding time period, gender, race, and class, students are able to see the importance of what peoples' differences bring to historical events. This allows students to have a vast repertoire of names that do not just focus on the main figure heads of certain time periods, such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. As Bigelow also pointed out, due to the variety in roles presented for the students to complete their project, there may be some individuals whose stories are quite limited to expand on as there has not been extensive research done about their life and their impact on society then and now, for example, Elaine Brown who is mainly known for her time as president of the Black Panther Party. This will in turn prove difficult for students to create an authentic and profound account of what this person represents in history. As an alternative to these individuals with little research done on their history, it could be a possibility to offer students the opportunity to discuss the main figure heads in history. However, these people whose stories are very ingrained into the traditional teaching method of the "master narrative" would have a different light shed upon them to uncover the other realities of their history. For example, Bigelow mentions John F. Kennedy who has been highly revered throughout history but whose actions are rarely called into question about how he did not act swiftly to deal with racial segregation in the South of the United States.<sup>17</sup> This would be an opportunity for students to learn about the principal figures

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<sup>17</sup> Zinn and Bigelow, "Unsung Heroes," 2 ([Annex 3](#)).

of the past from a multifaceted point of view that also calls into question the controversial aspects of their actions, or lack of action.

Secondly, while the idea of providing different historical figures from varying points of history allows the students to understand that people's actions always have an impact on history regardless of the time period concerned, this may prove to be difficult for students to understand history's progression from one generation to another. For example, Harriet Tubman and Jackie Robinson are figures from two very different parts of history, yet both contributed very influential and important experiences to the advancement of African Americans in the United States in different respects. Ideally, it would be beneficial for students to have historical figures provided throughout the year in accordance with the time period discussed. This would allow students to make the connections of how past choices impact and bring about future events. However, adapting this unit to an English classroom in France which follows a program of *axes*, this solution is not entirely possible. A solution to this would be to reduce the sample size of historical individuals included who have a history that would correspond with the *axe* in which the unit is placed. With a reduction in sample size, the individuals chosen can still be of various backgrounds to include not just the main figures of the event or movement being learned but pertain to a particular period or theme that is pertinent.

Another critique to the unit is the opening activity to the unit where students are to meet the other historical figures with their role description. This activity asks the students to answer questions relating to different figures in the exercise. However, it seems that there is a high possibility that students might not interact organically with the other students to find out more about whom they are representing, but that they will go directly to finding the answer necessary to fill in their worksheet. There are two possible activities that could be put into place so that each person is given the chance to share the role that they are taking on. A first possible exercise would be to do a sort of speed dating, where every two to three minutes students would change partners to discover a new individual. This two-to-three-minute period would allow for both students to present the information on their role card in a safe setting in pairs as well as be able to write down an answer on their worksheet if the role fits one of the responses. While this activity would take almost the entirety of the class period, it would allow for each student to meet all the characters. This would allow for an easier transition to the next activity when the students review whom they met and what they learned about that individual. Another possible activity would be to have students in pairs, where they take two or three minutes to share their figure with their partner. Then, as a class, students would be asked to share their partner's role for the other students to learn about and find if that individual corresponds to one of the

responses on the worksheet. This obliges the students to listen attentively, both while listening to the description of their partner's historical figure as well as in a class setting, when the partner shares the other's role. While this exercise will focus highly on listening comprehension, it also allows the students to express themselves while speaking. As the description cards are prepared prior to the activity, the students will have a structure of sentences that are grammatically correct to aid them in their written production later in their projects.

Additionally, regarding the final assignment, it would seem more beneficial for the students to have a certain form expected for the final product expected for the project. While inspiring creativity by having several possible productions available to the students, directions that are too vague could cause problems for some students, and therefore they would not have an idea of where to start or what would work best. For example, the expected format could be voted on by the students and be reduced to two possibilities, such as a letter or a dialogue. With these two options, students could also decorate or embellish their final product to spark their creativity.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research conducted in relation to the topic shows that the traditional teaching method where the “master narrative” takes precedence continues to be considered and reworked accordingly. This is due to teaching an inclusive history in the classroom which has a long history that has faced many successes and setbacks over the generations. It is important to note how the history of these trials and tribulations have brought the education system to where it is today. Students today are to learn about the multiple perspectives of history and people through a lens which allows them to develop socially as active participants in society, while learning about themselves and the people and world around them, to promote a more harmonious environment of understanding and acceptance.

Through the sources capitalized on throughout the research conducted, the evolution of the “master narrative” has undergone much questioning to better understand how one perceives the past, particularly how this is executed in the classroom. Through various explanations and reasonings, classrooms in the United States have seen this narrative put into practice which in turn ignores and quiets other important factors in its culture, specifically African American history. By not providing an inclusive history, students’ development of their critical thinking skills which lead to a deeper understanding of the historical content is stunted as they do not account for the various factors that partake in one individual event. Through a multi-perspective history, students are then able to see how everyday individuals, as well as more important social figures of the time, influenced certain movements through their voices and their actions.

Moreover, this awareness of the extensive roles that varying individuals play in the larger historical context allow students to realize the impact of their individual person as the larger part of a whole. Therefore, it is important to include various representations of people from all types of backgrounds so that they can see themselves through “mirrors” and realize that they are capable of creating an impact, as well as see others through “windows” to understand people who are different from them. This concept is essential in the sociocognitive development of students as this will lay a foundation for their future interactions in society throughout their life. Both the United States and France uphold, to a certain extent, the aspect of helping students to become more respectful of others and denouncing racism and its consequences.

Through the analysis of textbooks both past and recent, the evolution and progress of this inclusive historical context being presented in the classroom has gained momentum, allowing students to incorporate a multi-dimensional historical perspective into their critical thinking process of understanding the past and its implications on the present. This represents

a conscious effort by those in the education system to create an environment where all students feel included and represented through the topics being taught.

The concepts and ideas that are brought to light by the various specialists in education, racism, and/or anti-racism provide further in-depth research to understand why certain executions in the classroom can lead to future progress for future generations based on how an understanding of the past and the consequences thereafter are taught. It is through the active practice of dismantling the traditional teaching method that students will be able to situate themselves in history, through a relation to the past and to the present, and construct their identity to create future progression in the context of valuing others. This can be seen, as demonstrated, through adapting the units taught in class to better reflect a multi-perspective narrative. The inclusion of the varied factors that filter in to create a larger point of view of history will aid students in better understand the problems of the past, in order to create more well-rounded solutions for the future.

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### **Annexes – URL links**

#### *Annex 1*

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/critical-race-theory-ban-states>

#### *Annex 2*

<https://usafacts.org/articles/what-are-the-current-swing-states-and-how-have-they-changed-over-time/>

#### *Annexes 3-5*

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/teaching-about-unsung-heroes/>