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Black Lives Matter Movement in Social Studies Education

Chloe Wolfe

The University of Akron

Spring 2021

Abstract

Social studies education is taught throughout the United States, but due to educators and state content standards, it can look different in each school district. There are limitations and advantages to social studies education in the United States. This project analyzes social studies education within the United States through both state curriculum and state mandated standards. Social studies education can create educated and active students through the use of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework, that encourages students to participate in their communities and in society as a whole. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements have been increasingly prevalent in the United States and has been perceived by some individuals as controversial. It can be an unbiased conversation that incorporates social studies content and current events. Through research, observations, and interviews, this paper explains the importance of social studies education and why BLM should be incorporated into the classroom.

Introduction

Social studies education is a part of core curriculum, however, it is often brushed aside to make room for other subjects deemed more important or relevant to student success. There is limited instruction time for social studies education, especially for elementary grade levels which prohibits exposure to learning content knowledge (Council of Chief State School Officials, 2018). This puts social studies courses in a unique position as it is simultaneously important, yet easily overlooked and underinvested. Individual educators, administrators, and states must determine the trajectory of student success and what that looks like for their respective areas. To measure student success the ultimate objective is to have students graduate high school and receive their diploma (Ohio Department of Education, 2021). There is a strong emphasis on student performance throughout high school that can determine the future of each student. Each class a student is required to take is expected to encourage growth and knowledge of that subject area. “Ohio measures the performance of its schools based on how well students are progressing in gaining the knowledge and skills within the learning standards. We do this partly by measuring student performance on annual state tests based on the standards” (ODE, 2021, para. 1). Every public educator in the state of Ohio is required to abide by Ohio Learning Standards to provide students with mandated and consistent information. To become a social studies educator, candidates must be familiar with both the state standards and content topics, all of which they are tested during the process of getting a teaching license (ODE, 2021).

Students must take a combination of core classes and electives to receive their high school diploma. However, there can be a dispute between core classes and electives when determining the importance of courses on the path to student success. There is also a disagreement among core classes themselves when determining which subjects should receive

the most focus or funding (Au, 2009). In most states, social studies classes do not have a standardized test attached to them, while other subjects such as English and Mathematics do require standardized tests in all states (Hostetler et al., 2018). Does this make those courses more important? Why is social studies not seen as an equally important class? Depending on the individuals that one asks and their locations, will determine their answers to these questions. This paper explores the curriculum and stereotype associated with social studies classes and the strain that social studies courses encounter in schools across the United States.

To promote the significance of successful social studies education this paper analyzes the recent increase of the Black Lives Matter movement throughout the United States and its relationship to social studies education in different regions. Social studies education can provide students with information of current events to make connections to deeper rooted historical situations. The Black Lives Matter movement for example, is not anything new to United States history or racial inequality throughout the world. This is a living example of history in the making, which social studies classrooms could take great advantage of to educate students in a unique way. However, in most instances schools and states redirect resources into subjects that are associated with standardized tests or subjects that are regarded to yield the highest student success (Hostetler et al., 2018). If social studies classes are tailored to this model of educating students on the importance of current and historical events, these classes can be just as important to student success as other courses.

High School Social Studies Education in the United States

In many instances social studies education is stereotyped to exclusively include mundane dates, biographical information of dead political leaders, and of wars (Anderson, 2013). While this is not entirely inaccurate, social studies can include more within each course, depending on

state content standards and the effectiveness of the educator. It is important to provide students with a foundation of knowledge of these seemingly mundane facts to introduce deeper historical context from a variety of perspectives. Each story told through a social studies classroom can be told from a wide range of perspectives that provide a holistic view of a historical event which falls on the responsibility of the educator (Anderson, 2013). The majority of social studies courses in the United States are taught from the perspective of someone that is a traditional white American and because of this the perspectives of people of color, women, and of differing sexualities are excluded from the content. Loewen (2009) cautions educators to avoid using textbooks in the classroom and to instead take more important topics and expand on them in ways that it better connects students of all backgrounds. The white, middle class, male American perspective is most often shown through when discussing topics such as the founding of the United States, enslaved Africans, and World War I and World War II in social studies classrooms and textbooks throughout the country (Anderson, 2013). History as it is happening is perceived and recorded differently by individuals, yet students in the classroom are typically taught the simplified white version that appears in textbooks. Bryant-Pavely & Chandler (2016) suggest that it is important to pose the questions of “Who Benefits?” and “Who is missing?” from the context of the information presented in a textbook. By doing this, students will be able to use critical thinking skills to bring the idea of multiple perspectives to the classroom. The general tone of many textbooks only provides students with surface level knowledge from a single perspective of the content. Anderson (2013) reveals the state of Texas has one of the largest textbook manufacturers in the United States. This directly relates state standards of Texas to the information being written and published in those textbooks. This information is then spread nationally, representing the perspective of Texas textbook manufacturers. Textbooks are typically

a foundational material used in classrooms to support student learning of the content and with this type of bias it can be damaging to students when they are not exposed to multiple perspectives.

A component becoming more popular in social studies education is the idea of civic participation and knowledge being brought from the classroom into society. This can be done by incorporating the College, Career, & Civic Life (C3) Framework in the classroom by developing inquiry through content in social studies education (National Council for the Social Studies, 2021). The C3 Framework encourages students to connect with social studies content through inquiry, questioning, and democratic decision-making to develop engaged learners in the classroom and develops important skills to become successful citizens (NCSS, 2021). Social studies can become a bridge between student learning in the classroom and active and engaged members in a community. Educators are responsible for preparing students for college, careers, and participation in civic life and the C3 Framework supports educators to guide instruction in a specific way to make content learning purposeful (NCSS, 2021). If the content were to be more inclusive, more students would connect with the material in a way that is deeper and less surface level that would provide information from multiple perspectives. In the classroom it is critical for teachers to practice engaged learning that makes content topics relevant to the student and that can create inquiry to further investigation (Hostetler, 2018). Content can quickly become difficult for students to grasp if the topic is not something they can relate to in either their personal lives or with content already learned. This is true for many content areas, but specifically in social studies because of many preconceived notions of the mundaneness of social studies education (Busey & Walker, 2017). By having relevant content, students can apply knowledge, ideas, and

beliefs into their personal lives that can be reflected throughout their participation in a community (Thacker, 2016).

The growing transformation of social studies education into active participation is only successful when the educator designs classwork and discussions around the content instead of going through the motions of teaching content from a textbook or strictly from state content standards. Using the C3 Framework can be a challenging transformation from traditional classroom styles because it requires practice and attention to critical thinking skills for both the educator and the students (Thacker, 2016). However, the benefit of this model can result in positive and successful participation in civic life for students as they graduate high school and continue in their lives with college and career readiness. Thacker (2016) suggests that many educators do not practice the C3 Framework in their classrooms because of the challenges that come with having to teach in set time frames that are in accordance with state content standards. Although they acknowledge the importance of state content standards, it is important to recognize that there are limitations in the practices that teachers can demonstrate in their classrooms because of the explicit content standards. The Ohio Council of the Social Studies (2020) reported on their annual survey of 139 recorded participants that 79.9% of social studies educators in Ohio were not prepared in their teacher education programs to teach the C3 Framework. However, 79.1% reported that they do actively use inquiry in their classrooms through questioning, source work, and research. Of the surveyed participants, most of the educators did not learn how to incorporate the C3 Framework into the classroom, but attempted to create inquiry-based instruction in their classrooms. This lack of preparation in teacher education programs can be harmful to student learning in the classroom because 20.9% of educators do not use any inquiry-based instruction in their classrooms. These educators reported

that they feel there are challenges to incorporating the C3 Framework, the largest (91%) being lack of time to plan well developed lessons. They also explain that challenges come from a lack of educational materials as well as lack of proper training. The C3 Framework can be beneficial to student achievement if successfully instituted in the classroom.

A topic of social studies that often has some of the most controversies are the ones involving the treatment of different races in the United States. For example in a typical United States social studies course in high school, students will discuss the topics of enslaved Africans, the Civil War, women's suffrage, immigration, and the civil rights movement. All of these topics require the discussion of racism in the United States, but it is up to the educator to provide information from a variety of perspectives to accurately discuss the topic (Busey & Walker, 2017). state content standards require educators to inform students on these topics, but in many circumstances the educator has the freedom to highlight or ignore aspects of the topic in the content (Busey & Walker, 2017). This autonomy of teachers can either successfully enrich students to learn about racism from various perspectives or it can limit students' scope of perspectives because they are only exposed to the information that the educator is prepared to share with them. Stephen Thornton (2005) describes social studies educators as the gatekeepers of information and it is up to them to make appropriate teaching decisions. In some states, specifically South Carolina, Busey & Walker (2017) discuss the content standards relating to enslaved peoples and explain that they can lead the reader to draw a more literal conclusion than expected. In this case, the standard of enslaved Africans explains that it was an economic contribution to the American south and excludes the information of how the enslaved Africans were treated. This is the consequence of content standards and the freedom that educators must teach them. It would be solely up to the educator to explain the negative effects of enslaving

Africans and how its legacy continues to affect livelihoods and our institutions today (Busey & Walker, 2017). If the content standard was followed and explained verbatim it could lead to confusion of the true effect of enslaving Africans in the United States.

Black Lives Matter Movement

Black Lives Matter has been an increasing movement that began with a social media hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter in 2013. This began as a response to the wrongful death of a Black young man, Trayvon Martin, who was shot and murdered by George Zimmerman. This death was broadcasted on a multitude of media outlets and became a hot topic across the United States (Garza, 2014). Eventually, Zimmerman was acquitted of this crime and the media was an outlet for individuals to publically share their opinions. This not only sparked a conversation of the case, but the wrongful treatment of Black people and people of color in the United States by white people (BLM Grassroots, 2020). Racial injustice has always existed in the United States, but it can look different on a variety of levels. Some racism can be as blatant as name calling and violence or it can be subtle and woven into a part of society (BLM Grassroots, 2020). This murder case brought the issue of blatant violence to social media and was able to introduce the more subtle way Black people in the United States experience racism (Bell et al., 2020). Racism in the United States is a complex topic because it incorporates the historical background of the United States and the integrated racism that exists within institutions across the country. The social media presence of the movement had been growing steadily since 2013 however, Black Lives Matter (BLM) surged throughout the summer of 2020 after the death of another Black man, George Floyd, who was murdered by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin (BLM Grassroots, 2020). Similarly to the first death mentioned that sparked the BLM movement, this act of violence was also heavily broadcasted throughout the media, bringing attention to the

situation to more individuals. This also led to more exposure and a greater conversation into institutionalized racism against Black Americans, in this case specifically through authority figures such as the police. Throughout the continuing global COVID19 pandemic, there has become a deeper conversation of what it means to treat others respectfully and to care for strangers to keep them healthy and safe (BLM Grassroots, 2020). This idea tied directly to the death of George Floyd, so it began to explode a new movement throughout the country. BLM emphasizes that not only all lives matter, but specifically Black lives matter because the goal of the movement is to promote better understanding and awareness of the discriminatory treatment that Blacks receive in the United States (BLM Grassroots, 2020). BLM protests then began emerging in numerous cities throughout the United States to protest the wrongful treatment of Black Americans. These protests were also highly covered on an abundance of media outlets and social media platforms, causing controversy over the movement and created discussion of institutionalized and systematic racism in the United States. Recently, Derek Chauvin was found guilty in the death of George Floyd which has sparked more discussion and news coverage of BLM and systematic racism in the United States.

Personal Experience with BLM

As a college student (and an interested History major) it has felt like I am living through a major historical event as it is happening. This is partially due to social media, the location of The University of Akron, and my own personal active participation in the movement. When BLM first emerged in 2013 I was just beginning high school and getting social media accounts for the first time. I was exposed to the movement in its earliest stages and was able to see the reaction of the individuals around me in my predominantly white community. At the movement's earliest stages it sparked debate over social injustice, racism, and of political agendas. Of course

as a freshman in high school it seemed that I had more to worry about than a social justice movement happening on the internet, so I did not pay much attention or get active in the conversation because my peers were also not engaged in the movement either. However looking back now, I have been able to recognize the impact that this movement has had since it began in 2013 to today. Once there was the major resurgence in 2020 I was able to recognize the famous hashtag, #BLM and I was once again involved in the emergence of a historical event. I was now prepared to involve myself in the movement as it is a momentous event happening on social media at my fingertips and happening in my community around me. But I want to give credit for my preparedness to become involved in the movement to the social studies courses and the teachers I had in high school and college. In those courses we engaged in several discussions of inequality and the importance of active participation in society. These conversations in the classroom were with adults that I trusted and respected (and knew had some type of qualification) who explained the situation in terms that the class could relate with in our current lives. This seems somewhat simple and logical, but it left an impact on me and has inspired my growing involvement in my community, within my relationships with others, and with my students.

I am currently in my final semester of college and student teaching full time in a high school social studies classroom. This experience has given me the opportunity to openly discuss with my students about BLM and what they know of social media and the movement. It is important to note that the school I am teaching in has mostly Black students that are economically disadvantaged. To my surprise, these students are especially familiar with the movement and some of them have been involved in the protests themselves as some have occurred in their city. It is extremely encouraging to see my students engaged in such a major

historical event. Many students also support the movement by wearing “Black Lives Matter” clothing, masks, buttons, and phone cases. My students have grown up with social media and are exposed to both good and bad media coverage of the movement. This is where I believe it is most important to intervene and to scaffold students by providing them with the skills to vet information, analyze sources, and discuss facts. I want to be the respected adult that my students look to for unbiased and accurate information to help them digest news that is flooding in on social media that could be easily misconstrued or wrongfully interpreted. Having this type of stepping-stone for me as a student entirely changed my perspective of how important social studies was to my daily life, which is the same impact I hope to have on students as an educator.

BLM Connection to Social Studies Education

Previously discussed was the importance of educators following state content standards in social studies classrooms. These standards can be vague and allow for an educator to take their own approach to the instruction they practice in their classrooms. In the state of Ohio, social studies content standards do not directly address specific racial issues and excludes information from a variety of perspectives. Content Statement 16 of American History Standards states, “Racial intolerance, anti-immigrant attitudes and the Red Scare contributed to social unrest after World War I” (ODE, 2018). This statement is the expectation for students to understand and master the content when learning about the post WWI era. This does not explicitly describe the type of racial injustice, the groups affected, or what the attitudes of immigration were during that time period. The responsibility of educating students on the specific details then lies on the gatekeepers, or educators (Thornton, 2005). This can be achieved with the combination of the C3 Framework and successful educational strategies in the classroom. To incorporate Ohio state content standards and effective discussion of racism, educators should develop inquiry questions

into the Black Lives Matter movements that are currently active in the United States in 2021. This can connect relevant and current events accurately to state content standards but educators must take an extra step when developing units and lessons to incorporate this information. Depending on the climate of the school district, educators could create full lessons of Black Lives Matter or incorporate a discussion into a segment of a single content lesson. However, it is critical that educators are familiar with racialized content knowledge to shift learning from non-racism to anti-racism (King & Chandler, 2016). Informed teachers can create a safe environment for learning and discussion when talking about race in social studies classrooms. BLM movements can be incorporated in a variety of state content standards that include the discussion of movements, politics, ideologies, civil rights, or even research and evidence based standards (Dixson, 2017). This requires the educator to teach their lessons from a perspective that differs from the typical tone of a classroom textbook (Anderson, 2013). Social studies education in schools promotes active and engaged citizens in a community, so it is important to teach students how to do this through content learning. However, state content standards can be restrictive and prevent educators from teaching current event topics explicitly through standards or because school timelines do not provide enough time to deter from the standards. This is the limitation that educators face in the United States because the content standards are not explicitly inclusive or provide too much freedom to an educator, allowing them to teach students topics they deem to be most important (Pollock, 2004). BLM is a topic that can create relevant discussions in a classroom while also practicing important skills to becoming a better student while in school and an active and engaged adult in a community.

Research: Interviews of Social Studies Teachers

To discover more information of the struggles related to teaching in accordance with state content standards, teaching within a timeframe, the demographic population of the school district, and the practice of the C3 Framework, I have interviewed two current social studies teachers in the United States, one in the state of Ohio and one in the state of South Carolina. Both are originally from the state of Ohio and received their high school and college educations in Ohio. I asked each educator to discuss how they would approach a topic like Black Lives Matter in their personal social studies classrooms and the connections that can be made to the state content standards. It is important to note that both educators interviewed are white males around the age of thirty. I found it difficult to get in contact with a social studies educator of differing race or gender. The Ohio Council for the Social Studies surveyed social studies educators in the states of Ohio to determine demographics as well as perspectives of their relationship with the C3 Framework. Of the 139 surveyed social studies educators in Ohio, OCSS (2020) reported that 91.7% of all social studies educators in the state are white.

Ohio Social Studies Educator

I interviewed Christopher Davis, my student teaching mentor, to gather this information. He has been teaching freshmen Modern World History classes for six years, has his Master's Degree in Administration, and is both the wrestling and football coach. The high school in which he teaches has a 39.4% white student population, 37.9% Black student population, and 14.9% of students identify as mixed race. In addition, 100% of students in this school district are provided with free school breakfast and lunch. Mr. Davis went to this high school that he is currently teaching and before securing his full-time position, he was a long term substitute. During the interview he explained the struggle of teaching social studies to Ohio state content standards from two different perspectives, one as a teacher and one as an administrator. As a teacher, he

expressed his appreciation for the content standards as they allow him the freedom to design units and lessons in unique ways to appeal to a variety of different students in his classroom. This freedom allows for him to take the amount of time he believes is appropriate for each topic to enrich students in each of the content area topics. He enjoys the ability to take time to emphasize topics that he believes are the most important for students to know on both state tests as well as general knowledge in students' personal lives. Although he does recognize his responsibility to ensure that students are taught each of the content standards successfully to include multiple perspectives and with an anti-racism attitude. The freedom given educators with the Ohio state content standards require each teacher to be responsible to determine the length of time required for each standard and topic to guarantee student knowledge and growth in the course. As an administrator, he sees this as the largest concern of the content standards because each school district must rely on individual teachers to teach the content standards successfully in an appropriate time frame that aligns that both state tests and the school calendar. He explained that at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year he taught an entire lesson to his classes about the Black Lives Matter Movement. As stated in my personal experience with BLM, the school district has a positive, safe culture that allows for students and teachers to discuss this controversial topic. Mr. Davis stressed the importance of providing students with facts and resources to help them digest the information to allow students to develop their own ideas and responses to the information. He strongly believes that current events should be related to historical events and should be taught in schools to enrich student learning, but also to establish a conversation about news media. Through the C3 Framework, he generated a question of inquiry for students to research while using primary sources to explain their own opinions on the BLM Movements while connecting it to the content standards of the Enlightenment. He believes that

despite the school or city demographics, he would teach this topic to any school district because of his emphasis on facts gathered from primary sources without ever sharing his own bias or opinions. It is important to acknowledge that he feels comfortable in the school district that he is in because it is his alma mater as well as the only district he has worked in during his career. Most of the students in the school district are either Black or mixed students, which he explained exposed him to different cultures as a young age that has stuck with him. He actively does his own research and is excited to share his knowledge with his students.

South Carolina Social Studies Educator

I interviewed a fellow University of Akron graduate, Zachariah Lowe, who both student taught and earned a degree in the state of Ohio. He moved and transferred his teaching license to South Carolina, so he is familiar with the content standards of both states. He has taught eighth grade History for the past six years but now serves as a curriculum coach for his district. The school in which he taught has an 84.4% Black student population, 8.4% white student population, and 5.7% Hispanic population. Similarly to Mr. Davis, all of his students in the school receive free school breakfast and lunch. He has expressed his passion for South Carolina State Standards as he served on the board of the social studies standards writing team to develop new standards for the state. Prior to the updated standards in 2019 he explained that South Carolina state standards are very specific towards content knowledge of social studies. This reveals the notion of social studies being about factual dates and heavily entails information of knowledge. The new standards, revised in 2019, reflect the ideas of developing skills in the classroom such as evidence based learning and perspective learning of topics within the content. This type of learning can reflect the growing conversations of treatment of different races and indigenous groups in the United States. He also explained that the new state standards also allow

for flexibility of individual educators to teach information in a new way to connect content to current events, such as Black Lives Matter. Mr. Lowe explains that in his school district he would feel safe discussing BLM with his students and could connect it to relevant content topics as he already has done with the Confederate flag controversy that exists in the news media, specifically in the American South. Most of his students are either Black or Hispanic, so it is vital that Mr. Lowe is cognizant of the state standards and how they address racial topics. So far he has been successful and has earned teacher of the year for his school and was a finalist for teacher of the year in the entire state of South Carolina. He emphasizes the importance of remaining unbiased while teaching students to develop ideas to create their own opinions apart from the news media. He makes sure to incorporate the C3 Framework into his classroom to develop engaged content learning from his students. He has done this by engaging students with the Confederate flag controversy in their state. He had them research information and write letters to the state house so that students could explain their opinions of the Confederate flag. Mr. Lowe is actively growing in his career (soon to have his PhD) and works to provide students with a safe learning environment in the classroom.

Interview Results

Both educators interviewed expressed the positives and negatives of teaching towards their respective state content standards, a teaching timeframe, using the C3 Framework, and Black Lives Matter in social studies education. State content standards allow for teachers to develop lessons in unique ways to aid individual school districts and classrooms. This allows educators freedom to differentiate instruction and use teaching styles that work best for them. However, state content standards can prevent teachers from successfully teaching students content information in a uniform way. This requires the competence of educators as well as

administrators to check on their staff to make sure teachers are being responsible. The OCSS (2020) reports that 79.9% of social studies educators did not feel prepared from the teacher educator program to successfully implement the C3 Framework into their classes. Additionally, 91% indicated that they feel they do not have enough time to plan inquiry based instruction. Both of the interviewed educators agreed with these statements by acknowledging the importance of C3, but also the difficult preparation it requires. Teaching a controversial topic requires the responsibility of the educator, but also the climate of the school district to make the information relevant. To achieve this type of teaching, school districts have begun to implement professional development workshops for teachers to strengthen their knowledge of equity and inclusion in the classroom (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2019). With additional supports like professional development, schools are able to ensure that their educators are receiving training and resources that allow for them to establish a positive climate. A positive school climate can allow for a variety of conversations to take place and with teachers equipped to handle the discussion (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2019). Both educators also expressed the importance of keeping all information factual and evidence based to allow students to develop their own thoughts and opinions to assist them into becoming their own individual.

Research: Survey

To gather additional information of the actual practice and perception of social studies education in classrooms I surveyed 55 college students or recent college graduates that have graduated from high school within the last one to eight years. These individuals received their education from several different high schools and colleges in the state of Ohio. Each of the participants were reached through the social media platform of Instagram. It was important to put my survey on a social media platform where I could reach individuals that would also have had

exposure to BLM movements in the same way. The goal of the survey was, through convenience sampling, to determine how actual students perceived the type of social studies education that they had received in a variety of high schools across the state of Ohio.

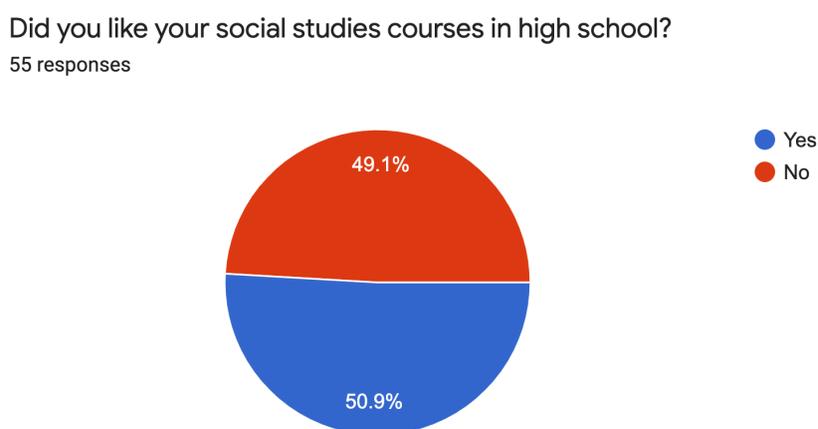


Figure 1

Figure 1 shows the first question asked in the survey asking individuals to reflect on their personal experiences in high school social studies classrooms. It was almost a complete divide in responses stating that they did or did not enjoy their social studies courses in high school. This could be because of a variety of reasons that were not identified in the survey. I wanted to gauge the initial perception of social studies education from individuals that were recently enrolled in those courses. Overall by less than 2%, the surveyed group of students did enjoy social studies courses in high school. Additionally, I wanted to keep in mind while surveying students the importance of state standardized tests and how they can affect the time and resources dedicated to a specific subject. Figure 2 shows the number of students that recalled taking state mandated tests in each of their core subjects in high school.

Do you remember having an end of the year state test in your Social Studies classes (world history, US history, Gov, etc) in high school?

55 responses

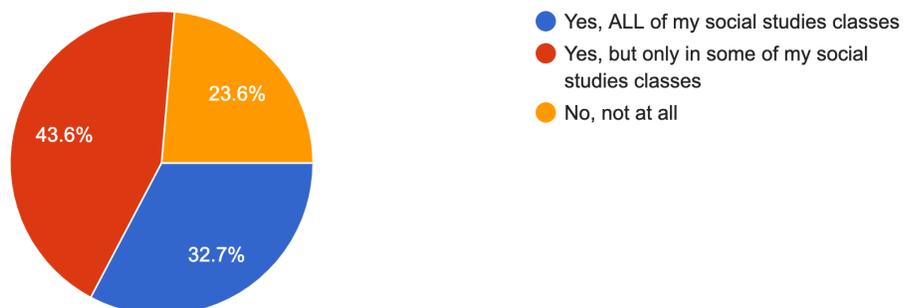
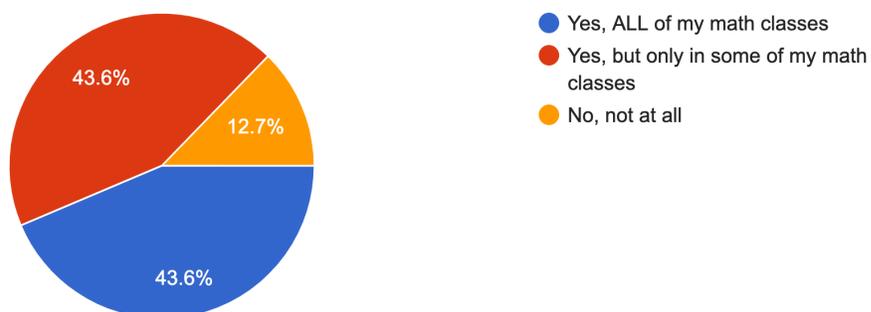


Figure 2

Do you remember having an end of the year state test in your Math classes in high school?

55 responses



Do you remember having an end of the year state test in your English classes in high school?

55 responses

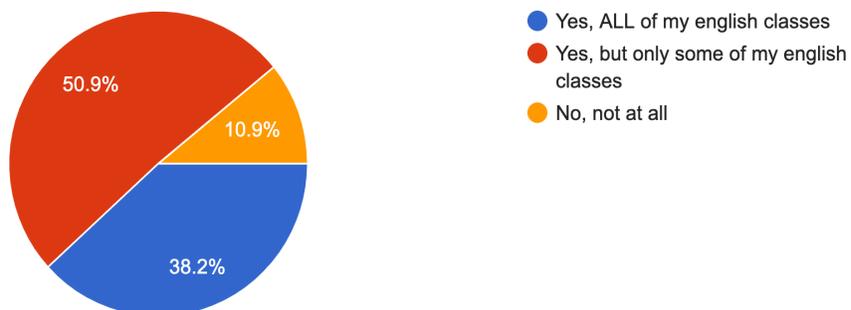
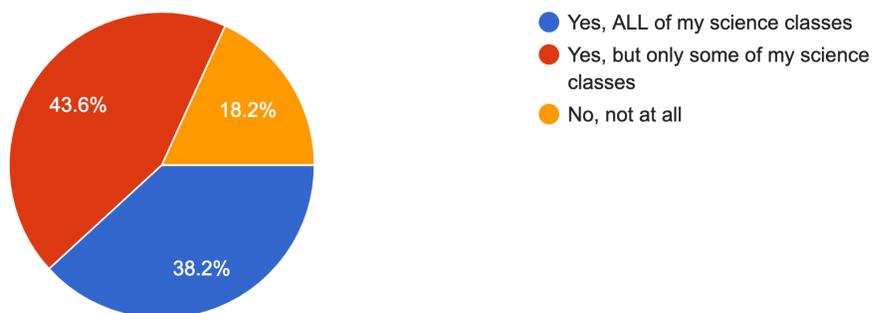


Figure 2
(cont.)

Do you remember having an end of the year state test in your Science classes (chem, bio, etc) in high school?
55 responses



When recalling each of the core subjects in high school, the surveyed college students recalled having a state standardized test in social studies the least, while Mathematics and English courses had the high percentages. If school districts promote the importance of successful scores on state tests, then teaching time and resources for those subjects can be allocated to other teachers and subjects that do have state mandated tests attached to them (Au, 2009). It is also important to mention that on the path for student college and career readiness students often are required by their school district to take the ACT test or it is a requirement of college admissions. On this test there are five total sections: Mathematics, Science, Reading, English, and optional Writing. The ACT (2021) website states, “Test scores reflect what students have learned throughout high school and provide colleges and universities with excellent information for recruiting, advising, placement, and retention” (para. 1), however social studies is a course taught in high school but not tested on this exam. This test is often a requirement of college admission which is an emphasis of student college readiness, omitting the importance of social studies education in colleges across the United States.

Another factor of the survey included information of the Black Lives Matter Movement that many individuals are familiar with in the college generation because of social media. Figure 3 asked students to identify if they had heard of BLM before 2020 or during 2020 when there was a resurgence of the movement because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

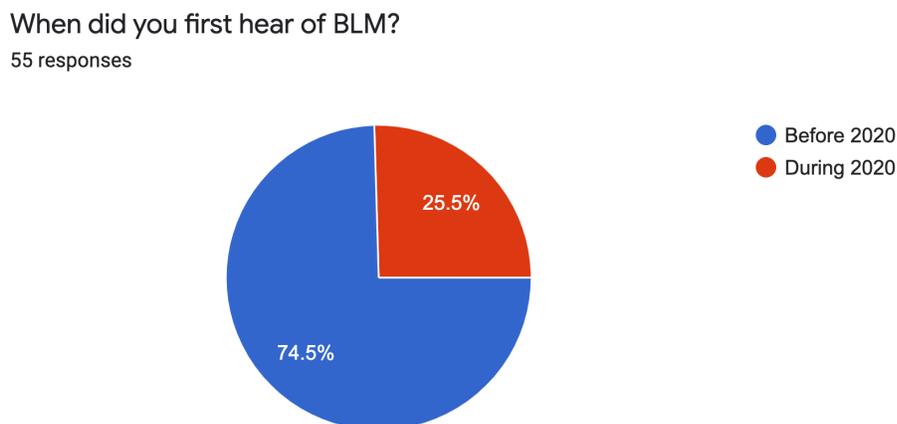
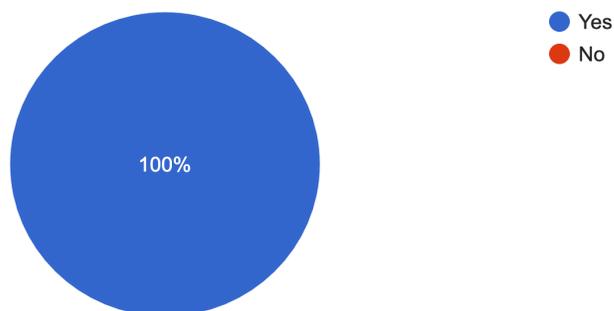


Figure 3

Of the participants surveyed, most indicated they had been familiar with BLM before 2020. This result is important when recognizing that these college students would have been in either middle school or high school when BLM first became prevalent on social media in 2013. Additionally, this survey was shared through the social media platform of Instagram, meaning each of the participations has access to a social media account. The BLM movement in 2020 was able to expand as quickly as it did because of social media platforms such as Instagram to show live images and videos of protests taking place across the United States. Figure 4 shows that every individual that participated in the survey had previously heard of the BLM Movement.

Figure 4

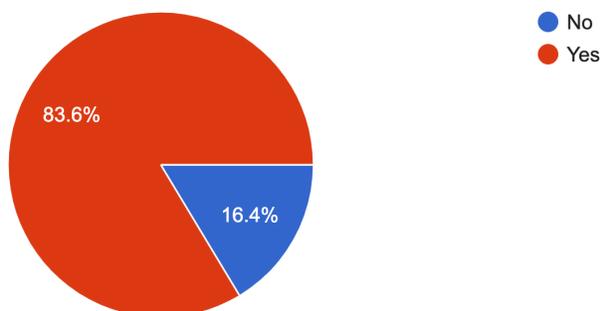
Have you heard of the Black Lives Matter Movement?
55 responses



With this information I also wanted to gauge how these college students felt personally about BLM Movements and if they believe there can and should be a connection made in social studies classrooms. Figure 5 demonstrates the amount of college students that believe BLM Movements should be taught in high school social studies classrooms.

Figure 5

Do you think BLM should be discussed in schools?
55 responses

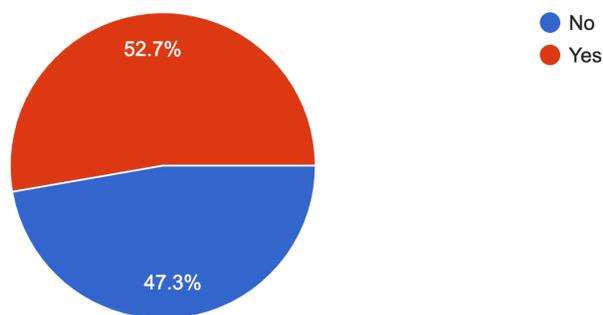


The results show that the majority of the surveyed participants believe that BLM should be discussed in schools. This question measures the beliefs of these individuals regarding BLM and how they perceive either the movement itself or what social studies education should entail. In

many instances, teachers are encouraged to stay away from controversial topics in a classroom to prevent a hostile environment in a classroom of students (Busey & Walker, 2017). However, if the content is taught in a way that is unbiased and evidence based, it could be easily incorporated into state content standards (Bell et al., 2020). In addition to learning about participants' beliefs of discussing BLM in schools, I felt it was important to determine if they believe they would have received that type of information in their own personal high school experiences.

Do you think in YOUR high school, one of your teachers would have talked about BLM with your class?
55 responses

Figure 6



The data shows that the response is almost split in half if the participants that believe one of their previous teachers would have talked about this controversial topic with them. This result combined with the result that a large number of the participants believe that BLM should be discussed in schools shows that they were not given an opportunity to explore controversial topics with an educator. It is important for students to be given to correct tools to digest primary sources and information given within social media (Bell et al., 2020).

Finally, to conclude the survey I ask each participant to explain their response to the question, “Do you think BLM should be discussed in schools? Why or why not?” This was

optional for participants to respond to, but I received 43 responses of the 55 surveyed. I have selected four responses, two that responded “Yes” and two that responded “No”.

I support BLM being discussed because they're movement is valid. There's so much misconception with the group, some people even suggest that the group's purpose is to place higher importance on black lives vs other racial groups. However, by education high schoolers about the true purpose of BLM (the purpose is to promote that the inequality, discrimination, and racism is still highly present in black lives, and they are promoting that their lives matter as well), then from their high schoolers can base their own opinions on the group with proper education and information. It's not that hard, yet some people get angered by even saying the group's name “Black Lives Matter”. The only way to combat racism is by becoming self-aware of our pre-existing conscious/unconscious racist, biased, and stereotype beliefs that society has engraved into us.

BLM needs to be discussed in high school because soon these children will become adults and start working in the workforce. This means they may be working/friends with POCs and need to know the history of this movement and how to help their friends in need. I feel like this may be problematic though because in my high school, discrimination and racial slurs were thrown around by students in school (and teachers outside of school but they do not want to talk about it). If students were educated about this movement and it was not whitewashed away like Jim Crow laws, then actual progress would happen. Especially, if there is not a large amount of the student body that is POCs. Learning about this subject will allow the student's mind to develop and become more understanding of other cultures. It also will prepare them for the real world outside of the 4 walls of high school, where standards are set and are different regarding race.

I do not think it should be discussed in high school because I feel it will pull students apart instead of bringing them together and it also teaches that if you're of African American decent you are not responsible for your own future because you will go through life thinking that everything and everyone is against you even though your future has a lot to do with the decisions you are making now in high school.

First and foremost, I think it promotes the idea of seclusion. We discuss earlier periods of time regarding racism and I think it could potentially be discussed in the future when studying our current era. It could be discussed in a class teaching current world events, but I did not have a class like that in high school, nor was it offered to me. It may be discussed, but if it is taught, I believe there is a difference. You should be taught morals to treat each other with kindness at a young age, however I do not believe high schools need to be teaching morals of any kind. Back to my first note, it would create seclusion between races in the school and make students feel uncomfortable. It should be a policy to treat others equally and it should be enforced.

These responses reflect the beliefs and reasons of the participants for selecting either “Yes” or “No” in Figure 5. Most of the participants did select yes and many of the written responses also reflected this percentage.

Survey Results

The survey indicates that college aged students believe BLM Movements should be taught in high schools and they see the connection to social studies classrooms. There was a higher percentage of individuals that believed BLM should be taught in high schools compared to the percentage of the individuals that believed they would have had the opportunity to learn about BLM in their high school careers. At the same time, it was recognized that social studies was the least tested subject in high school. This can prevent time, dedication, and funding given to social studies courses by school districts. All the participants are familiar with BLM, but some only learned about it recently in the year 2020. If educators were to have discussed BLM in 2013 when the movement began, there could possibly be different results or perceptions among these individuals. The written responses show that the participants of the survey had strong opinions on both sides of the issue, as do several Americans as it is extensively covered in news media. The two responses that explain that BLM should be discussed in schools acknowledge the racism that exists in the United States and advocates for younger children to get involved with the conversation and believe schools are an appropriate setting for this to happen. They even connect BLM to social studies content information, mentioning the relevance of the topic to be added to the classroom. There are two responses that explain BLM should not be discussed in schools and question the morality of bringing up the topic in a public education setting. These participants explained their reasoning of why BLM is not an appropriate topic to discuss when in a public high school setting because it can be uncomfortable or upsetting to students in the classroom.

They also justify their response by describing how discussing racial issues can create an unsafe classroom environment. However, social studies education can be more about civic life and participation than the typical idea that social studies is about learning strictly the content standards and not being able to incorporate anything extra that would not be tested.

Conclusion

Social studies education is a complicated subject that requires attention from students, educators, as well as the community. Social studies provide a way for educators to get students in the classroom both engaged with the content, but also to become active members of society. The National Council for the Social Studies (2016) strives to differentiate learning in social studies classrooms to create a new approach to the content. Social studies can be overlooked or represented in schools due to lack of funding, testing, or the beliefs that it is not as important as other core subjects in high schools. It is up to the educator and administrators to ensure that students are receiving a quality education in social studies despite teacher or community bias. Civic engagement is an emerging component of social studies education and it can help to incorporate students into their communities to learn and grow in the content area as well as the real world. The Black Lives Matter Movement that began in 2013, but heavily expanded in 2020 is an excellent example to get students involved with current events in their communities by tying the information to social studies content standards. This is often overlooked and difficult for teachers to accomplish because they are required to teach in tight schedules and specifically to state content standards. Through research in both interviews and a survey, it was indicated that social studies teachers want the freedom to discuss these topics and previous high school students wish they would have been given that type of opportunity. Social studies is an important core subject that should be emphasized more in school districts across the United States.

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