**Effects of Color-Evasive Pedagogy on White Adolescent Interpretations of History**

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Schools are a central fixture in many American children’s lives. From middle childhood to adolescence, the influence of parents and other caretakers tends to decrease as they interact more with peers, teachers, and other adults in their communities (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Bradshaw, 2014). By high school, individuals begin solidifying their beliefs through the lenses of social identities like race (Williamson et al., 2020**).** For example, analysts have investigated the role teachers play in Black students’ self-esteem, academic evaluations, and interpretations of history (Bañales et. al 2020; Brown 2007; Francis & Darity 2021; Hughes 2009; Pena-Shaff et. al 2019). Other studies extend these issues to Latino, Asian American, and multi-racial individuals (see, e.g., Brega & Coleman, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Stone 2017).

Interactions between teachers and white American students remain largely absent from these inquiries due to the seemingly invisible and white-centering logic of color-evasive ideology, which posits that race does not matter, modern-day racism is the consequence of a few prejudiced people, and racism is a relic of the past (Annamma et al. 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Lewis, 2004).[[1]](#footnote-1) In the United States, "race" is a dynamic social construction contingent on the country's unique history of white domination and the marginalization of Black, Asian American, Latinx, and Indigenous peoples (Ifekwunigwe, 2020). Because of their dominant position in the United States' contemporary racial order, white individuals have an ego-protective incentive to practice color-evasiveness (Plaut et al., 2018). It allows white individuals to enjoy both the material and psychological wages of whiteness while attributing racial inequalities to personal shortcomings (Du Bois 1920). Few scholars have examined how white youth reproduce, rework, or contest such beliefs as they interact with their teacher’s pedagogical approaches. This paper specifically focuses on white adolescents’ interactions with color-evasive messages to evaluate the extent to which they reproduce, rework, or contest color-evasive ideology broadly.

Past studies on race and school contexts often recruit parents and teachers to report students' racial practices (e.g. interracial friendships, standing up to racism, etc.) and racial beliefs (Hagerman, 2017; Onyekwuluje, 2000). Shifting the focus of this scholarship from parents to their children's perceptions can illuminate aspects of behaviors and beliefs that are often obstructed from their parents' view. During adolescence in particular, individuals increase their autonomy and elevate the importance of relationships with those outside of their families (Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Smetana et al., 2015). Therefore, it is possible that messages transmitted by teachers would grow in relevance during high school. By equipping child-centered methods to understand teacher-student interactions, analysts can more easily develop existing theories about the reproduction of dominant racial ideologies and better inform anti-racist teaching strategies and school policies (Rogers, 2021).

To be sure, schools provide a limited view into the lives of adolescents and their interactions with teachers. Past analyses have revealed that the socializing roles of parents, the media, and peer networks, to name a few, are not easily separable from each other (Vitrup, 2011). Likewise, studying adolescence alone ignores earlier life experiences that shape individuals' views and identities. As such, policies and practices intended to disrupt color-evasiveness must also target earlier stages of development (Hagerman, 2020). Like students, instructors’ beliefs about race are also complicated. All individuals create racial narratives from a variety of sources, from their education to mandated curricula as well as personal experiences with racial groups or racism. Finally, since white adolescents are socialized differently, conclusions cannot be generalized to white teenagers overall; factors like geographic region, class, sexual orientation, and gender also shape perceptions and beliefs about race and racism (Ghavami & Mistry, 2019; Grossman, 2009; Hatchell, 2004). Despite these limitations, the whiteness cannot be discounted; as mentioned previously, white individuals disproportionately benefit from society’s allocation of privileges which ultimately shapes their narratives about race.

This paper begins with a review of racial and ethnic socialization (RES), particularly among white adolescents, and directs it towards a discussion of how pedagogy exists as race-making and socializing practice. Synthesis of psychological, sociological, and educational scholarship reveals that teachers have a limited effect on white adolescents’ interpretations of history. Many white instructors and white students share similar framings of racial groups’ roles in American development and national identity. Since color-evasive ideology pervades discussions both inside and outside of classrooms, white students tend to maintain their pre-instructional beliefs. Furthermore, the effect of teachers on white youth may be confounded with those from those of other socializing agents. Future studies can navigate the complexities of ideological formation by gathering more information about these lives of white adolescent participants outside of school contexts and by acknowledging their active role in ideological formation.

**Racial Socialization and the White Habitus**

Population geneticists contend that human variation does not satisfy discrete biological “races,” yet race remains socially real (Graves, 2003; Keita et al., 2004) Today, racialized practices and social relations continue to shape Americans' life outcomes across areas of housing, wealth accumulation, health, and education (see, e.g., Akbar et al., 2019; Trent et al., 2019; Wight, 2020). While significant associations exist between race and educational outcomes, for instance, like graduation rates, grades, discipline, and educational attainment, they do not reflect racial groups' inherent characteristics. Consequently, the "main effect" of race, as well as other racial measures, are sensitive to the social structure of American schools and society broadly.

Children learn about race before their school years through racial and ethnic socialization (RES), “a social, cognitive, and developmental process through which individuals transmit, negotiate and acquire beliefs, values, social norms and behaviors to engage appropriately with society” (Loyd & Gaither, 2018, p. 55). Early RES literature illuminated the central role Black parents and caregivers play in their children’s self-esteem, racial pride, and preparation for bias (Peters & Massey, 1983; Richardson, 1981; Spencer, 1983; Tatum, 1987). Outside of families, school contexts also mediate Black students’ development of racial beliefs and identities by exposing them to racial inequality and racial messages, both in formal and informal instruction (Watford et al., 2021). These include race-based social inclusion and exclusion (Hitti et al. 2014) in peer groups, evaluations from teachers (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020; Redding, 2019), and discussions of Black history, to name a few.

RES scholarship has recently investigated how white children understand race in family and school contexts. Throughout their lives, but especially during their children’s preschool and elementary school years, White parents tend avoid conversations about race and racism or communicate to their children that such issues should not be discussed (Bartoli et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2010; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup, 2016). Despite their parents’ avoidance of “race talk,” white children still form racial attitudes and beliefs about racial inequality and racism based on perceptions and racial messages. Rather than prepare for discrimination, white individuals are socialized to race as they discover and process their racial group’s unearned advantages (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984, as cited in Karras, 2021).

The *white habitus* explains how the totality of these messages constitute a “racialized process of socialization” that develops white individuals’ beliefs, perceptions, tastes, and behaviors (Bonilla-Silva 2018, p. 73). The strength of the white habitus persists despite historical efforts to racially integrate neighborhoods, social networks, and schools (Burke, 2012). As early as 6 months in age, individuals can categorizes individual faces by race (Paulker et al., 2019; Spencer, 2008). By middle childhood, the socializing and racializing work of the white habitus leads white individuals to prefer peers or toys based on race (Aboud, 1988; Clark & Clark, 1939; van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Stokes-Guinan, 2011). In the United States, primary white school-aged children learn to shift away from explicit attitudes once they learn that they are less socially acceptable (Sinclair el al., 2005; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Finally, white adolescents crystallize their racial identities and discuss racism, diversity, and racial privilege in a more abstract and complicated way). Adolescence is a critical period for the study of racial ideologies since they are constructed both in relation to their previous life experiences as well as their solidifying understandings of racial identity.

Many white individuals acquire color-evasive ideology during RES and their experiences in the white habitus. Bonilla-Silva (2022) theorizes four "frames" of color-evasiveness: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism justifies racial inequality with the vague language of equal opportunity, individual freedom, and meritocracy. For example, some individuals use abstract liberalism to argue against school integration policies (e.g. bussing, redistricting) by framing them as violations of parents and their children’s freedoms. The second frame, naturalization, explains racial inequality as “just the way things are” (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, pp. 90–93) Naturalization can appear in messages describing peer network segregation, like students’ preferred tables in a school cafeteria, as normal occurrences (Tatum, 2017). Often, these arguments ignore the underlying racism that leads white students to exclude students of color. The third fame, cultural racism, levies stereotypes about communities of color to justify persistent inequality. One such case of this frame arises in Hagerman's (2020, p. 184) interview with an adolescent girl who claimed that “even a poor black kid could… move up,” but their success would be hampered by their parents’ supposedly inferior financial habits.

As previous examples regarding school choice and peer networks suggest, color-evasive messages circulate schools on an everyday basis. Compared to informal interactions between peers, teachers, and school staff, racial ideologies can arise most clearly in teacher’s pedagogical approaches. Pedagogy, or the process by which educational material is taught, often invokes ideological frames along dimensions of race, class, and gender (Apple, 2004; Murphy, 2008). In this article, I focus specifically on racial messages transmitted by teachers through their pedagogical approaches to history.

**Race and Education**

At the time of this article’s writing, American political discourse has intensified around the teaching of race and racism in public schools. Some have mobilized in response to the perception that American children are indoctrinated by certain racial frameworks like critical race theory. This backlash arose after a period of racial reckoning following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black individuals at the hands of police, which has since exposed other racialized practices across society. Recently, several state legislatures have passed or introduced bills banning teachers from discussing “divisive concepts” such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (“Alabama House approves bill banning ‘divisive concepts’”), often explicitly regarding the teaching of American history. These developments, however, are nothing new to educational spheres. Debates over school curricula have long invoked relations of power and national identity, ultimately deciding which ideological knowledge will become school knowledge (Thomas, 2015; Wills, 2019).

How matters of race are discussed in classrooms depends largely on the racial identities of their teachers. Today, more than three-quarters of high school teachers are white, yet students of color constitute more than half of American public school’s total enrollment (Pew Research, 2018). As demographic changes in country increases the salience of race, racial inequality, and racism in classrooms, teachers’ interpretive frames of these issues dictate how these matters are examined.

Like parents and peers, instructors can socialize white students explicitly as they discuss their ideas and values about race. RES can also occur implicitly when teachers avoid certain topics about race or use color-evasive frames to subtly modify racial histories. Most teachers, for example, report discussing racial inequality and racism with their students but rarely do so in practice (Schofield, 2006; Vitrup, 2016). Recent studies reveal that approximately 70 percent of teachers ascribe to color-evasiveness, a figure comparable to the overall adult population (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 202; Vitrup, 2016). However, teachers’ decisions o equip color-conscious or color-evasive pedagogical decisions also draws upon differential access to Whiteness: the power to ignores or downplay racially imbalanced privileges and disadvantages (Howard, 2018). Racial imbalances in privilege and power explain why white educators are more likely than educators of color to acknowledge the advantages that white Americans enjoy throughout history and today (Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Wills, 2019). The incentive to conceal white privilege helps explain, in part, why many white teachers ascribe to color-evasive ideology.

Color-evasive ideology exists quietly in any discussion about racial identity, racism, and racial inequality (Dalton, 2008). Instructors can equip its frames in their pedagogical approaches as well as their differential treatment and appraisals of students (Thomas, 2015). Literature about the effect of pedagogy on white adolescents’ interpretations of history can be grouped into two categories: their views on the role and significance of different racial groups in American development and formulation of a national collective identity through concepts like citizenship. In both cases, white adolescents are exposed to color-evasive messages that they can reproduce, rework, or contest.

**Interpretations of Racial Groups’ Historical Significance**

As mentioned previously, many teachers report discussing race in their classrooms yet seldom do so in practice. This principle appears prominently in teachers’ portrayal of European-Americans as the leaders, inventors, and nation builders and victimized or simplistic images of other racial/ethnic groups. For example, excluding Sacagawea in the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804, many teachers exclude individual Indigenous people from their post-American Revolution lessons (Martel, 2018; Peck, 2010). As a result, white adolescents tend to discuss Indigenous Americans using past-tense phrases like “lived in teepees,” “some lived in longhouses,” or “they fished and grew plants or had different religions” (Epstein 2009, p. 61). This assumption draws upon Cook-Lynn’s (2001) theory of “anti-Indianism,” which describes that which treats American Indians and their tribes as if they no longer exist. Hatchell’s (2004) analysis of historical pedagogy in Australia also points to the effect of anti-Indianism on white adolescents. Despite white adolescents’ increased sympathy towards these groups after learning about European colonialization, many struggled to understand or support their contemporary claims to sovereignty, land and resources. These interpretations reveal how victimized and simplistic portraits can prevent individuals from viewing Indigenous people as important actors in both the past and present (Peck, 2010, p. 594).

Like the teaching of Native American history, white adolescents are exposed to pedagogical approaches that strip other racialized communities of their agency and contemporary relevance. For example, teachers often exclude details about lynchings and other racial violence throughout history, especially in Asian American and Latinx communities (Brown & Brown, 2010; Salinas et al., 2016).Curricular standards and teachers also downplay Black Americans’ resistance to slavery and other regimes of control (Loewen, 2008). Even within the Civil Rights Movement, teachers often dilute the messages of leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Cesar Chávez to their most palatable arguments (Carlson, 2003; Epstein, 2009). For example, teachers often ignore King’s most radical critiques of systemic racism and capitalism as well as the violence he faced in both life and death (Alridge 2006). In Epstein’s (2009) ethnography, these ideas transpired in eleventh graders’ letters written to his children during their Civil Rights unit. One letter follows:

I wanted to know how you felt after your father’s birthday passed. I know it was hard when your father passed away. Just know we will always keep your father’s dream in our hearts. I’m glad your father’s dream came true. (Epstein, 2009, p. 75)

Similar messages simplifying King’s message (e.g. “he was important for everyone being equal”) reveal the effect of color-evasive pedagogy on student’s understanding of Civil Rights. By obscuring the movement’s structural goals and abstracting King’s “dream” to matters of morality or personal prejudice, both teachers and students ignore the realities that Civil Rights activists faced. The two eleventh grade history teachers in the school argued that Civil Rights leaders “stood up for people’s rights and everyone was listening” (p. 72). As a result, white adolescents could not believe that most white Americans opposed King (“Public Opinion on Civil Rights: Reflections on the Civil Rights Act of 1964”), and some explained that segregationists simply “treated blacks mean” (p. 75). At first glance, white adolescents’ celebration of Black leaders and opposition to old-fashioned racists appears color conscious. However, these two ideas ultimately serve color-evasive ideology by washing down their historical significance and precluding contemporary understandings of racism.

While several frames of color-evasive racism were evoked while describing racial group’s historical significance, minimization and naturalization of racism appear most prominently. For example, in an ethnography of a classroom, one teacher study opposed several Black students’ suggestion that the class learn about Jesse Jackson during Black History Month (Epstein, 2008). He argued that Jackson’s association with Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam was too controversial, and that Black history month should focus on more “positive” leaders (p. 56). This comment is in keeping with national data revealing that Black students experience less respectful and “open-classroom” environments than their white peers (Knowles 2018). After silencing further critiques and comments made by Black students about their Black history month lessons, several of the white students became upset with their Black classmates. One responded:

When black history comes around, it’s nothing but problems. Black kids are mean to the white kids, like it was us who were the slave owners… But when civil rights come around, blacks get angry… That was in the past. Blacks think it affects them but it doesn’t (Epstein, 2008, pp. 78–80).

Versions of refrains like “The past is the past” and “I was not a slave owner” also appear prominently in interviews with white adults and college students when asked about racial inequality today (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, pp. 127–131). Ultimately, these phrases serve color-evasiveness by concealing and naturalizing persistent racial inequality. White adolescents, like their teachers, can reduce racism to the consequence of a few prejudiced people, thus ignoring its structural and historical significance. Consequently, this logic normalizes manifestations of racism like residential segregation: “there has always been segregation because you are always going to have racist people…” (Epstein 2009, p. 79). Collectively, the use of simplified heroes and victimization while discussing Indigenous and Black history can undermine their evaluations of their historical and contemporary relevance (Banks & Banks, 2019). In the case of Latinx, Asian American, and Native American activism, the minimization of racism frame more easily erases their historical importance and contributions altogether.

Color-evasive pedagogy appears to somewhat affect white students’ characterizations of racial groups’ roles in history, but does it also affect their beliefs about race relations? Color-evasive teachers and textbooks often send “mixed messages” about the relationships between racial groups throughout American history (e.g. cooperation and conflict) that disguise power imbalances (Espstein, 2009). This perspective seeks to balance “positive” examples of racial cooperation with “negative” facts about enslavement, dissent, segregation, and persistent racial inequality (Levstik, 2000)**.** However, as mentioned previously, white adolescents already diminish the salience of people of color in their interpretations of history. As a result, white students rarely characterize dynamics between racial groups unless asked directly (Hewitt, 1986; Landsman, 2009). In Epstein’s study, for example, white teenagers often focused on the “positives,” like Indigenous peoples’ assistance to European colonists (e.g. “showed settlers how to hunt” p.63) and multi-racial coalitions during the Civil Rights Movement. In other words, white students seemed to ignore the teacher’s “negative” statements about colonization and racial violence.

Wills’s (2019) analysis of essays written in a unit about white-Black segregation during the Civil Rights era similarly reveals the limitations of pedagogical frames on white students’ interpretations. During one lesson, a teacher argued that racism arose from ‘segregation within [one’s] own color’ and that ‘race is really a difference of culture and society’ (2019, pp. 20-21). The belief that race is a cultural production, reflecting a set of values and beliefs, successfully challenged the teacher’s students’ biological construction of race but did not introduce race’s relationship to social and cultural power (Levstik, 2000). Consequently, “only a few” of the 65 essays written on the topic of “social change” mentioned race or racism explicitly (p. 30). This group included content about race either discussed racial discrimination (e.g. segregation in Birmingham, Alabama) or Civil Rights Movement was simply about ‘blacks [wanting] to prove that they were equal to the white man” (Wills, 2019, p. 30). Unfortunately, the ethnography’s data did not differentiate the essays by racial identity. However, the “handful” of color-conscious essays still represent a small fraction of the total white students (n = 29) in the study. Most students minimized the role of race in the Civil Rights unit, pointing to the overall low salience of race relations in the classroom. However, it is hard to deduce the contribution of the teachers’ approaches to their white students’ interpretations due to the lack of data collection before instruction.

**Constructing National Identity**

Given the silencing role of color-evasive pedagogy on historical narratives about people of color, it is possible that it also influences white adolescents’ construction of national identity National identity is one example of collective identity, a “sense [indicating] a joint awareness and recognition that members of a group share the same social identity” (David & Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 356). As discussed earlier, teachers and white students tend to understand American development as the product European American contributions. Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian American communities are often excluded from white Americans’ constructions of national identity despite their accomplishments (see, e.g., Ancheta, 2010; Bailey et. al 2021; Devos 2010; Gao 2020). and established presence in the United States. These erasures infiltrate mostly clearly through white adolescents’ constructions of the citizenship.

Citizenship is a social construct that draws upon one’s cognitive, social, and affective attachments to their national identity. The liberalist and hegemonic conception of citizenship emphasizes its “set of rights, duties, and identities linking citizens to the nation-state” (Banks, 2014, p. 3). Supporters of this definition argue that “primordial” and racial/ethnic attachments prevent total assimilation and allegiance to one’s country. However, others argue that liberalist citizenship ignores national identity’s historically contingent arrangement of social, political, and civic meaning, specifically white American’s and institutions’ controlled over which subjects receive citizenship (see, e.g., Chavez 2013; Edmo et al. 2016; Wu 2014). Although the United States has always been a multicultural and multiracial nation, the Immigration Act of 1965 removed previous barriers to immigrants from many parts of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. These demographic changes, alongside movements on college campuses and educational spheres to institute ethnic study departments, has led to greater critiques of liberalist citizenship, specifically how it ideologically reflects who socially belongs to a collective identity, and how they are placed within the social structure.

These demographic and social developments, however, have yet to replace the hegemony of liberalist citizenship in mainstream discourse. High school students today are still socialized to view entitlements to national identity through a color-evasive lens that more subtly disguise racial/ethnic attachments and inequalities. For instance, Levstik’s (2000) study of adolescents and history teachers explored how they negotiate national identity’s membership through discursive divides (e.g. we vs. them). During instruction, both groups instinctively used the first-person plural to delineate white historic actors from those in marginalized racial/ethnic groups. Teachers, for instance, described the colonial period and American Revolution as the time when “we began” (p. 288), ignoring the fact that other civilizations have inhabited the Americas for several thousand years prior to colonization. When asked to explain the origins of Thanksgiving, one white student responded: “We was making a bond with Native Americans; that’s good because that’s a tradition that goes on forever” (p. 289). The connection between the teacher and white student’s use of the first-person plural displayed their shared investment in a white-centered national identity. Native Americans, although mentioned amicably, were neither included nor completely detached from the American collective. This outcome mirrors the broader status of Indigenous groups; while subjected to the state control, they are still barred from some of the social, political, and cultural entitlements of citizenship (Cornbleth, 1997; Se-ah-dom Edmo, 2016). As teachers reinforce discursive divides between Indigenous people and the European colonists, many white adolescents learn how to conceal differential access to citizenship while maintaining whiteness as a criterion to social citizenship.

Besides Indigenous peoples, teachers may exclude other racialized groups from national identity through their retelling of history. Bettie’s (2014) ethnography exhibits the unique marginalization of Mexican American narratives in a high school’s history courses. In one classroom, a white teacher made scant references to Mexicans and Mexican Americans besides the Alamo and the U.S.-Mexican War, the latter of which he quickly summarized: “we won Mexico” (p.177). In response the teacher’s question, “When was the Declaration of Independence signed?” a Mexican American student commented, “I don’t know. *We* weren’t there” (p. 178). A white teenager added: “Yeah, I wasn’t born yet.” The white teacher, dismissing both boys’ comments, fired back: “Yeah, well you need to know these dates anyway, don’t you.” Like the white student before him, the teacher overlooked the first student’s attempt to highlight the exclusion of Mexican American’s racialized history (Urrieta, 2004). The double entendre between the white and Latinx individuals in the classroom points to the subtleties by which color-evasiveness identity is reproduced in relation to national identity. Ultimately, the teacher’s pedagogical approach minimizes and separates Mexican and Mexican American history from the overall historical narrative.

Racial stereotypes can similarly lead white adolescents to exclude marginalized racial/ethnic groups from their constructions of national identity. Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American students in classrooms with more prevalent stereotypes tend to exhibit lower levels of self-concept and belonging (Byrd, 2015, 2017). In one study recruiting multiracial adolescents, participants explained how stereotypes reflected one’s access to national identity based on their proximity to whiteness and distance from Blackness (Jones & Rogers, 2022). One girl, for example, identifying as ‘several things’ but ‘overall’ as Mexican, explains how peers categorize her as “illegal” and “dumb” and dismissed her claim to Irish ancestry during the school’s Saint Patrick’s Day celebration (p. 14). The logic of hypodescent extended to the racial assignment and stereotyping of other multiracial adolescents, including the model minority myth (Wu 2014) used towards those perceived as Asian, as well as lower expectations of intelligence and work ethic with those perceived as Black (Jones & Rogers, 2022; p. 14-20). All these stereotypes led their white peers to separate their multiracial peers from their sphere of national identity (Jung 2015; Seo & Lee, 2021).

Unlike peers, teachers reinforce stereotypes implicitly through interpretations of national identity. Past studies reveal that students perceive teacher’s differential treatment of racial/ethnic groups’ histories (Kumar et al. 2011; Seo & Lee 2021). Specifically, by downplaying the historical significance of certain groups, they can implicitly separate marginalized racial groups through a white-centric understanding of national identity. For example, the adolescents may directly invoke the “perpetual foreigner” (see e.g., Chavez 2013; Huynh et al. 2011; Zia 2000;) stereotype towards Asian American and Latinx peers, but teachers can indirectly reinforce the stereotype by ignoring both groups’ presence and contributions to American progress. Consequently, current classroom discussions are unprepared to disrupt narratives, symbols, and media imagery that separate marginalized racial/ethnic groups from notions of national belonging (Naseem Rodríguez, 2019).

In contrast to the separation of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American groups from national identity via discourse and stereotypes, teachers’ treatment of European ethnic groups more actively promotes optimistic and assimilationist narratives in their classrooms. Such interpretations, encapsulated through the “melting pot” symbol, constructs American identity as one benefiting from the incorporation of various racial/ethnic groups into the (white) mainstream under the condition that immigrants discard their attachments to racial/ethnic groups (Banks, 2014). These interpretations stem from progressive era reforms seeking to assimilate European immigrants, especially school age children, by mandating citizenship courses and condemning the practice of non-English languages (Moretti, 2015).

Today, white adolescents, many of whom descend from the late-nineteenth century European immigrants, celebrate the groups’ contributions, affirming that they “made this country what it is today” (Epstein, 2008, pp. 73–74). However, these narratives ignore the nature of European immigrants’ oppression before they were recognized as “white” (Barrett & Roediger, 2005), as well as the persistent barriers endured by marginalized racial/ethnic groups (Chavez, 2013; Zia, 2000)**,** introduces a paradox about teaching national identity. How can the “melting pot” be an appropriate symbol for national identity when many who enter the United States have faced resistance to assimilation?

Ultimately, assimilation narratives reinforce the color-evasive frame of abstract liberalism by reinforcing notions of meritocracy and individual freedom based on the assimilation of European immigrants into whiteness. The “melting pot” narrative also equips the minimization of racism frame to downplay the salience of racism in the construction of national identity. Finally, cultural racism imposes anti-Indianisms and stereotypes that maintain the perception of marginalized racial groups’ non-assimilability. These color-evasive interpretations are supported by both discursive divides and stereotypes that maintain white-centered ingroup and outgroup boundaries. However, since pedagogy only plays an indirect role in maintaining these stereotypes compared to peers, it is difficult to determine the overall importance of teachers in socializing students to national identity. Moreover, teachers and students are likely exposed to same color-evasive notions of national identity outside of classrooms. As a result, the relevance of pedagogical contexts appears to be that they facilitate pre-existing racial messages rather than disrupt them.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Analyzing the transfer of interpretive frames from teachers to students is a complicated process. Many of the studies mentioned in this article omit white adolescent’s pre-instructional beliefs. By doing so, they are unable to discuss how students’ interpretive frames change or remain the same throughout the school year, thus preventing accurate measures pedagogical effects. Due to the prevalence of color-evasive ideology outside of schools, for example, in student’s homes, media consumption, and peer contacts, white adolescents likely experience several contexts of color-evasive ideology before instruction. By drawing upon and controlling for students’ lives outside of classrooms (see, e.g., Epstein 2008; Williams et al. 2020), future studies can paint a more comprehensive portrait of racial ideology acquisition.

A second powerful limitation of the material covered thus far is secondary or nonexistent position of student’s voices. Teachers’ practices or interpretations of history and contemporary issues often receive the primary focus of studies (see, e.g., Aronson et al. 2020; Chu 2004; Picower 2009; Martel 2018**).** However, the effect of pedagogy is as important as how it is received by teachers. While teacher-centered analyses can help develop a portrait of the type of racial messages they transmit, it cannot be assumed that they are fully absorbed by their students. For example, past studies have shown that students of color can rework, or in some cases wholly contest messages transmitted by color-evasive pedagogy (hooks, 1997), as was the case of Black students in Epstein’s (2009) ethnography. White students’ interactions with instructors are similarly complicated; the extent to which they reproduce, modify, or contest racial narratives depends to some extent on their prior racial socialization (Saleem & Byrd, 2021; Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, the salience of teacher’s approaches on white adolescent worldviews are best can be best understood in the broader context of student’s prior RES.

The final limitation I emphasize is the lack of sufficient discussion and data about teacher and students’ racial identities. As mentioned previously, race is socially constructed identity, its significance drawing upon inequal treatment by racial structures and practices rather than essentialist attributes. Moreover, how individuals experience their racialization varies based a number of factor, including their past experiences, appearance, and other social identities like gender and class (McCall, 2005). Still, the ways in which individuals are socialized to racial identity greatly affects their experiences of the world, and common threads can be uncovered on a large scale. Future studies can ground the differential access to power that racial identity introduces to classrooms, especially in the interpretive frames teachers of different racial identities incorporate.

**Conclusion**

The studies discussed in this article reveal that color-evasive framings appear in many history classrooms across the United States. Both white adolescents and white teachers tend to minimize the role of racial minorities in American development, from their use of anti-Indianisms to their marginalization of Latinx and Asian-American histories. Black Americans, are casted as victims or simplified heroes, thus limiting their perceived-historical significance. Teachers and students alike also dilute the messages from social transformations like the Civil Right Movement to individual-centered critiques of prejudice rather than structural ones of racism.

The marginalization of racial/ethnic racial groups in historical significance also transpires in students and teachers’ formulation of American identity. Discursive divides between we (white individuals) and them (individuals from other racial groups) visibly shifts white adolescents’ constructions of American identity. They, like their teachers, come to understand history through a white-centric perspective that celebrates the assimilation of European immigrants into the American collective while distancing racial minorities from national identity. A color-evasive conception of Americanness helps teachers subtly marginalize individuals from other racial groups using cultural stereotypes like the perpetual foreigner as well as messages of meritocracy and egalitarianism.

To understand how racial ideologies are reproduced, future studies into pedagogical effects must incorporate a more comprehensive view of students’ lives. White adolescents are influenced by their previous experiences of racial socialization and the white habitus. White youth also play an active role in their development of racial ideologies. Therefore, evaluations of white adolescents’ beliefs before, during, and after instruction can help produce textured analyses of white students’ interactions with racial messages, rather than assuming that they are simply reproduced. Ultimately, a push a youth-centered direction for futures studies will help unlock more accurate estimations of how teachers influence the interpretations of white adolescents on American history.

**References**

1. In this article, I use “color-evasive” as the preferred term versus “color-blind.” Evasiveness better captures how individuals refuse discussing racism in daily life, while also being sensitive to those who are blind. For more details, see Annama et al.’s (2016) theorization of color-evasive ideology. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)