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# Social Studies Education Review

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**Developing Future Citizens of America:  
Repositioning Social Studies Education in an Era of Accountability**

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**Abstract**

As a discipline, social studies develops critical and historical thinking skills while exposing students to democratic values. Such skills remain essential to preparing future leaders of America. Yet, recent research continues to demonstrate the increased marginalization of social studies, especially in light of educational reform movements and accountability measures. This study interviewed eight 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers from diverse central Massachusetts elementary schools to better understand the voices of teachers. In particular, the teachers described factors impacting their instructional opportunities in social studies. Implications from this study include additional collaborative opportunities with other educators at the same grade level to gain more pedagogical skills and content resources in social studies. Additionally, participating teachers needed improved educational opportunities during teacher preparation and in-service profession development to gain more familiarity with current standards, frameworks, and resources. Such opportunities also support improved pedagogical content knowledge.

**Keywords:** social studies, teacher education, qualitative research, accountability reforms

Imagine a typical school day for a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader in an American public school in 2018. Students stroll into the classroom at 8:40 a.m., greet their teacher, and hoist huge backpacks onto cubby hooks. They promptly sit and begin the daily “Do Now” review of multiplication facts. After reviewing attendance and ordering lunches, the teacher dutifully writes the state frameworks and learning objectives on the white board. Then the onslaught of academics commences with a 90-minute English language arts (ELA) block, followed by snack, enrichment (music, art, or physical education), lunch, recess, a 90-minute math work period, and 45 minutes for standardized test preparation to finish the day at 3 p.m. During the ELA block, students rotate through centers—guided reading, writing workshop, and independent reading. The math block entails computation paired with written expressions to develop rich mathematical understandings. Additionally, students practice multiple strategies for solving equations and

checking their work. Such practices provide meaningful learning opportunities, and yet, this common schedule ignores an essential field – social studies education. While the marginalization of social studies continues to solidify in the United States, diving deeply into teacher’s beliefs about how and why this shift perpetuates provides a research basis for changing our approach to educating the next generation.

### **Relevant Literature**

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) promotes social studies as a subject where students “do” disciplinary work as historians, geographers, economists, and civic leaders rather than complete textbook-centered methods focused on fact memorization. Scholars have long argued for the essential inclusion of social studies in the elementary curriculum in order for students to gain knowledge and skills in civics, economics, geography, and history (Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Collectively, these areas help prepare students to become informed and active citizens. Social studies education provides students with deep knowledge about democratic practices and critical thinking skills demanded for participation in government (Passes 2006). Other content areas rarely emphasize such skills. As future leaders, students must demonstrate knowledge of America’s founding documents including the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Such exposure enables young people to make “informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an independent world” (McCall 2008, p. 137). So, we return to the question - why has social studies education become marginalized when it has potential to play an imperative role in shaping young citizens of America?

While the National Council for Social Studies continues to promote the benefits of social studies education, a national survey confirmed students fail to receive exposure to a strong social studies education (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014). As a discipline, social studies remains marginalized in the current era of accountability (Bolick, Adams, & Willox, 2010). Reductions in social studies instructional time to just 12 minutes per day in early elementary grades and 24 minutes per day in upper elementary grades persists (Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; Van Fossen, 2005). Such trends push researchers to ask how social studies can regain prominence in the elementary curriculum? This research study stems from this inquiry as it explores the voices of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers regarding social studies instruction.

### **Accountability Shifts under No Child Left Behind**

With the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, accountability took hold in American public education. State standards and corresponding high-stakes tests were mandated. While individual states retained autonomy to develop their own standards, the educational landscape in the United States dramatically shifted to increased federal control. In most states the development of standards and assessments resulted in “curriculum sprawl” (Olwell & Raphael, 2006) where content and skill demands expanded in many directions. Olwell and Raphael (2006) argued that NCLB caused a curriculum sprawl that expanded the breadth and depth of the benchmarks that students were expected to reach without expanded instructional time allotted for mastery. Marzano & Kendall (1998) estimated that teachers were expected to cover 200 standards and roughly 3,000 benchmarks in one academic year. These 3,000

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benchmarks demand more than 15,000 school hours, yet only 9,000 hours exist in a school year. As a result, up to 40% of the expected content may go untaught. To ensure that the tested standards are fully covered, 44% of districts in the United States have reduced time for social studies (McMurren, 2007).

The time period that followed the passing of the NCLB Act (2001) became known as the “Era of Accountability” due to the importance placed on quantitative test scores and value-added measurements. These accountability measures reduced the focus of state mandates to quantifiable metrics (Betebenner & Lin, 2010). States were required to hold students accountable for content learning by requiring students to take standardized, subject-specific, high-stakes exams. Schools gained labels as low-performing or high-performing based on student performances on high-stakes exams (Winstead, 2011). For example, students receiving lower scores impacted the school’s overall rating. If enough students performed poorly, the school may be labeled as “failing” and eventually be taken over by the state. Additionally, school performance designations affected funding. Thus, under-performance became a cycle. Low-performing schools were less likely to succeed because, “the schools, their teachers, and their students receive fewer funds for learning support and, thus, have fewer resources to commit towards improving or attaining higher scores” (Winstead, 2011, p. 222). Low-performing schools have attempted to improve student performance on standardized exams, and in turn, their school’s ratings, by emphasizing tested content and test-taking skills.

During the era of accountability, many states like Massachusetts developed curriculum frameworks and a corresponding evaluation tool like the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). MCAS has been administered in grades 3-8 and grade 10, in English language arts, mathematics, and, in some grades, science/technology. Although social science/history MCAS exams were administered in Massachusetts as pilot exams, mandated exams have not been adopted. The lack of accountability measures has significantly marginalized the subject of social studies in Massachusetts for more than a decade. Similar trends exist in other states. The Center on Education Policy found 44% of all districts have reduced time for social studies and 51% percent of districts with failing schools have limited social studies instruction (McMurren, 2007). Comparably, Winstead (2011) and Vogler (2003) confirmed that subjects with standardized exams receive more instructional time in elementary classrooms than those subjects without mandated, state-wide testing. Such evidence-based research illuminates an alarming pattern - social studies continues to receive limited instructional time because school districts are dedicating more of their instructional time to subjects that are tested (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Rock et al., 2006).

### **Limited Content Knowledge**

Moreover, teacher’s lack of social studies content knowledge further reduced instructional time for social studies in elementary classrooms (Ritter, 2012). Preservice teachers often experience methods courses in literacy and mathematics, but fewer have a methods course in social studies instruction (Ritter, 2012). Furthermore, teachers who dislike social studies or do not feel confident teaching social studies content, use the tight schedule to squeeze out social studies (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). When elementary educators find time to teach social studies, they often utilize fact-recall, teacher-centered, textbook instruction (Winstead, 2011). Such pedagogies fail to engage students in meaningful experiences as developing historians. Although many states have social studies standards, teachers spend little time teaching social studies due to

limited instructional time, greater emphasis on tested subjects, and limited formal preparation to teach the complexities of social studies education. Consequently, we are creating a public education crisis by ignoring a subject that is essential for developing active citizens in a representative democracy.

### Research Methods

Two research questions guide this study - 1. How do 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers, in central Massachusetts, describe their experiences teaching social studies? 2. What factors do teachers say impact social studies instruction?

### Grade-level Selection

Three factors influenced the selection of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers in Massachusetts: organization of the MA curriculum frameworks, organizational structures of elementary schools, and the onset of standardized testing. The Massachusetts' Curriculum Frameworks for History and Social Science (2003) utilize the expanding communities organizational approach – a common model in the United States for over 80 years (Halvorsen, 2009). In this approach, earlier grades focus on content directly connected to students' lives, moving to local history, followed by state and national history and culminating with world geography. Figure 1 displays the social studies content emphasized at each grade level in MA.

**Figure 1. Massachusetts Social Studies Curriculum Organization**

Pre-K and Kindergarten	• Family and Community
1st Grade	• US and World Folktales
2nd Grade	• Citizenship and Family History
3rd Grade	• Massachusetts and Local History
4th Grade	• Geography
5th Grade	• Columbian North America
6th Grade	• Geography and Europe

In addition, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teaching teams are less likely to use a departmentalized approach where one teacher instructs multiple sections of a discipline like social studies, as is the case in many middle and high school settings. Departmentalized teams often have blocked times in the day's schedule for each core subject. The goal of this project was to better understand how classroom teachers who taught all subjects utilized their time. And notably, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was chosen because it

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is the first exposure students have to high-stakes tests in Massachusetts. As a result, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers are often required to teach both content and test-taking strategies.

### School Selection

Due to the potential impact of school context, the participants included teachers across the Massachusetts “leveling” system. The leveling system, developed in response to Massachusetts passing of the *Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* in January 2010, was formalized by the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education as a means of labeling schools based on “absolute achievement, student growth, and improvement trends as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)” (Stein, Therriault, Kister, Auchstetter, & Melchior, 2016). The lowest performing schools, level 5, need the most support, while level 1 schools receive the least support. The participants were selected from levels 1-3 schools due to both accessibility and general curricular focus. Teachers in level 4 schools - designated turnaround school- and level 5 schools – under state take over- were not the target populations due to the multitude of factors confounding those schools’ curricular decisions including significant lack of teacher autonomy.

### Participant Selection

The study utilized a convenience sample of eight participants in one central Massachusetts county. The sample was gathered using personal and email inquiries. The initial respondents suggested additional potential participants through a snowball sampling technique.

**Table 1. Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Urban/Suburban</b>	<b>Level of School</b>
Marisa	Suburban	1
Alice	Suburban	1
Ted	Suburban	1
Jessica	Suburban	1
Caitlin	Urban	2
Deirdre	Urban	2
Karen	Urban	3
Rachel	Urban	3

## Data Collection

Interview data provided insights into the teachers' lived experiences with social studies instruction (Creswell, 2014). The researchers used a semi-structured interview technique where the researcher assumed that the interviewee had unique and important knowledge of social studies instruction (Rabionet, 2011). The semi-structured design supported use of the same series of initial questions yet provided flexibility to explore additional topics. Semi-structured interviews enabled stronger comparison and standardization for improved generalizations. A sampling of interview questions is included in Figure 1. Each participant was interviewed one time for 30-60 minutes.

### Figure 1. Sample Interview Questions

- How much time do you spend teaching each subject per week?
- Does MCAS testing impact how or what you teach?
- Describe your typical social studies lesson?
- Do you have a block of time designated for social studies, or do you integrate social studies lessons into other subjects?
- How much freedom do you have to decide how you teach social studies?
- If you could change one thing about your social studies instruction, what would it be?
- Do you believe you have gaps in your own social studies knowledge? If so, in what areas?
- What do you think are the student benefits to learning social studies?
- Are you familiar with content integration? If so, how would you define it?
- Do you use content integration in your teaching? If so, how do you integrate?

## Data Analysis

Initial analysis began when one of the researchers transcribed the interviews. The interview data was then read several ways by both researchers independently to ensure openness to new perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Completing multiple reviews of the data helped to ensure all possibilities were identified (Patton, 2015). As explained by Creswell (2014), this process of analyzing open-ended, semi-structured interviews ensured more grounded findings.

After independent analysis, the researchers worked collaboratively to analyze key themes, patterns, ideas, and concepts from the interviews. During this stage in the research process, key topics were coded, sorted, and organized. Then codes were compared and contrasted to look for patterns. From the eight transcriptions, 31 codes were developed, and subsequently, collapsed into four analytical categories: accountability and high-stakes testing, instructional time, common core state standards, content knowledge and availability of resources. As Patton (2015) explained, category development enables confirmation of relationships found in data. Further, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) supported the notion of searching for consistencies and inconsistencies when reviewing qualitative data. Consequently, the two researchers conducted a process of testing various data sources, both confirming and disconfirming, and revising the associated categories (Maxwell, 2013). This process provided the necessary framework for analyzing teaching beliefs and decisions using a close examination of category

formation to identify meaningful explanations related to social studies instruction (Clark & Creswell, 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## Findings

Recent education research recognizes the decreased presence of social studies in elementary classrooms (Duplass, 2007; Groen, 2012; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; O'Connor, Heafner, & Groce, 2007; Olwell & Raphael, 2006; Tanner, 2008; Winstead, 2011). After conducting interviews with eight 3<sup>rd</sup> grade elementary school teachers in central Massachusetts and completing qualitative analysis of the interview data, four obstacles (data analysis categories) were identified as impediments to effective social studies instruction – accountability and high-stakes testing, lack of instructional time, impact of the Common Core State Standards, and lack of content knowledge/available resources. While noteworthy, these obstacles are not new dilemmas in the field of social studies. However, deeper analysis into the voices of the participating teachers uncovered how the teacher's relationship with time permeated their stories and provided a platform to uncover how their beliefs supported their actions. The findings below share teachers' experiences with time and the effect on their social studies practice.

### Reduced Instructional Time

As expected, participating teachers noted pressures imposed from high-stakes testing related to increased accountability. Five of the eight teachers, across school performance levels one to three, illustrated how their school's accountability status impacted their teaching; the lower the level of the school, the more negative the impact. All eight teachers shared how testing impacted their teaching schedule and time demands. Savage (2003) outlined how high-stakes testing can negatively affect academics due to a "narrowing of the curriculum, spending great amounts of instructional time on what is to be covered on the test rather than on what is important, implementing tedious drill and skill activities." (p. 202). Data from the study reinforced such findings from the literature. Deirdre described the impact of accountability "we teach test taking strategies, how to write an open response, and how to write a short answer response." Similarly, Jessica noted "3<sup>rd</sup> graders don't come with the necessary skills to take standardized exams like MCAS. They need to learn how to bubble the letter, how to check their work, and options for persevering when they get stuck." Comments like Deirdre's and Jessica's explain how instruction and content were impacted by the time needed to prepare for mandated accountability measures.

As a result of the pressure to support student performance on high-stakes exams, non-tested subjects, like social studies, are either eliminated from the curriculum or instructional time is greatly reduced (Winstead, 2011). Winstead asserts that less than 20% of instructional time is devoted to preparing for and teaching social studies. Data from the eight participants verified this reduction in time. All eight of the teachers reinforced how their English language arts (ELA) and math blocks were equal to or greater than 60 minutes five days a week. In all cases, social studies blocks were, at most, 45 minutes, 2.5 days a week. For example, Alice described her schedule as including ELA and math for an hour, five days a week, and then a special block for science or social studies for 45 minutes twice a week. All eight participants confirmed the research - science and social studies were not taught on the same day. In many respects, science and social studies compete for the same block of instructional time during the week. The teachers explained

how they pick science or social studies based on preference or curricular alignment. Caitlin noted her students have “90 minutes of math, 90 minutes of ELA, and we throw the science and social studies in here and there.” Jessica expounded “I have a designated social studies block that alternates with science for 40 minutes a day.” The participants’ voices solidified how social studies instruction continues to be marginalized across schools due to an emphasis on the tested subjects. When asked what would most benefit students’ social studies learning, four participants wished for “more time.”

### **Textbook Approach to Covering the Standards**

While many of the teachers believed they had flexibility in how they approached teaching social studies, they were expected to address the appropriate standards. The findings across all three accountability levels were similar – teachers at each level utilized the textbook as the main organizational structure. Caitlin explained “I use the standards, but I design how I want to do it.” Deirdre emphasized her reliance on the textbook for organization purposes:

We do it from the social studies book. So, we’ll cover a chapter a week from the *Massachusetts Our Home* textbook. Typically, we work on vocabulary words, review them, and then there’s a listening component. We just went over what an ‘artifact’ was in the last audio recording.

Similarly, Karen highlighted “we have a textbook called *Massachusetts Our Home* and that’s pretty much what we do.” Notably, across all levels, teachers’ approach remained textbook-centered and routine. Rachel explained how her school adopted a science program which identified what material the teachers “needed to cover” whereas in social studies there was more “teacher work” to determine how and what to teach. As a result, she noted her desire for additional materials and training in teaching social studies. This is a key perspective to highlight since teachers who lack strong content knowledge in social studies may be less likely to devote the time needed to develop strong instruction. Often teachers with minimal content knowledge desire curricular materials for structure (D’Souza, 2018).

### **Decreased Autonomy and Limited Creative Practice**

Four of the eight participants explicitly noted their desire to increase the amount of time they spent on social studies instruction. Two of the teachers wanted more time for hands-on, inquiry-based social studies lessons and the other two teachers wanted more time to teach social studies more generally. Marisa explained “I guess it would really be that I had more time to do the creative activities. There’s so many great inquiry, hands-on things that are so fun to do, but there are things on our content standards that are so stretched because of so much we have to cover and how fast we have to do it.” Alice concurred “I’m a very hands-on teacher, so I would love to reconstruct a Wampanoag wetu” but with her limited instructional time she feels unable to implement her ideas. The sheer number of standards to be covered across content areas prevent some teachers from hands-on, inquiry lessons in social studies content due to the limited time in a school day (Marzano & Kendall, 1998). Marisa explained how she found success when she connected student learning to the bigger question of “why is this important to learn?” and then connecting new ideas to the outside world. She believed that this makes learning both interesting and relevant. However, she often found it more challenging to do so when the rush to finish the standards prevailed. Ted and Rachel both expressed grave concerns over the push for

data-driven, evidence-based mandates. Rachel asserted, “we look at data all the time.” Ted expanded:

we used to be child-centered. Now we’re data-driven, and everything is assessment. We spend a lot of time doing assessment, rather than giving out what a child at 9-years of age really needs - to have fun and do a lot of out-of-the-box thinking. We find ourselves just teaching to the perimeters now.

Ted used the term “perimeter” to highlight a concern far more reaching than simply time constraints. He argued the heart of teaching has been sacrificed due to accountability-driven instruction. Notably, three teachers in the study did not highlight a loss of autonomy or limitations on creative practice. Without follow-up interviews, it remains difficult to know if these teachers believed they had the necessary autonomy or if they believed it was not a central impediment to their social studies instruction.

### **Discussion**

The broad conclusions of this study articulate similar concerns from the last decade of social studies research - time restrictions, standards coverage, and decreased teacher autonomy (Duplass, 2007; Groen, 2012; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Heafner, Good, O’Connor, Passe, Rock, Byrd, Odlendorf, & Groce, 2007; Olwell & Raphael, 2006; Tanner, 2008; Winstead, 2011). However, the participants’ suggestions illuminate the concerns in a new light. First, the participants centered solutions on developing relationships with teachers at the same grade level to ease the burden of planning, integrating, and developing instruction. Both level 1 and level 2 teachers pushed for more detailed collaboration. For example, Marisa, a level one teacher, expressed how many of the other 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers supported her in her school, “everybody has their focus area and they help find resources and information so we can be more effective.” Alice, a teacher in another level 1 school continued, “We make sure we share everything so that the kids are not missing out.” Similarly, Jessica, also a teacher in a level 1 school, concurred about the value of collaborative planning “we collaborate as a team and we use all the same resources. Our styles of teaching our different, but a lot of our activities are similar. The kids are getting the same experience in every classroom.” Likewise, Deirdre, a teacher at a level 2 school, noted “we do team and we share. We don’t team teach, but there is collaboration.” However, it is important to highlight what was missing from the interview data – none of the teachers at level 3 schools noted collaborative practices. This does not mean that collaborative practices failed to exist as it is possible that the teachers at level 3 schools did not see the necessity in such collaboration for a variety of reasons.

### **Implications**

In 2006, Passe explained how the social studies crisis is partially a result of teachers overlooking the subject. As such, the National Council for Social Studies argues that teachers need proper preservice education and professional development, along with daily instructional time and access to resources in order to provide meaningful social studies instruction (NCSS). Likewise, Guidry (2010) found teachers overlooked social studies due, in part, to limited content knowledge. Guidry noted how most preservice elementary teacher preparation programs require a single history course for content development. Similarly, Tanner’s (2008) research argued that

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teachers' attitudes regarding the necessity of social studies were affected by the limited emphasis on social studies in their preservice education programs. Tanner articulated how the beliefs of elementary preservice teachers' can shift if field-based experiences include rich and varied opportunities for social studies instruction including drawing connections to students' daily lives and utilizing resources beyond the textbook. By ensuring teacher candidates have such opportunities, they can better connect theories learned in coursework with meaningful, classroom-based practices. Such findings provide guidance for the necessary shifts in our approach to teacher preparation.

Furthermore, limited opportunities to develop strong pedagogical content knowledge - what and how to teach - (Gudmundsdottir & Schulman, 1987) extends beyond teacher education. Professional development opportunities in social studies also remain limited. Participants noted the negative impact of limited professional development on social studies instruction. In particular, Rachel suggested, "I think a lot more professional development could be beneficial. Even a think-pair-share of teachers' ideas." Drawing a larger conclusion, Tanner (2008) outlined how the extent of social studies instruction directly relates to a teacher's understanding and interest in the content area. Tanner's research explained how teachers with solid content knowledge and meaningful instructional techniques increased the prominence of social studies in the classroom (Tanner). This research study, coupled with previous findings in the field, emphasize the necessity for developing stronger pedagogical content knowledge for elementary teachers in social studies.

Another possible area of development for teacher education and professional development, includes gaining familiarity with current standards, frameworks, and resources. Beyond the state standards and curriculum frameworks, teachers also need familiarity with *National Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies* (2010), and the NCSS' *College, Career, and Civil Life (C3) Frameworks* (2013). However, teachers in the field were often unaware of these resources or they found the sheer volume of frameworks, principles, and organizing structures overwhelming. The more aware teachers are of the existence and possible use of resources, standards, and guides, the greater the opportunity for effective integration and inclusion of social studies instruction in the elementary curriculum. However, exposure alone is not enough to change practices. Teachers need guided instructional opportunities to collaboratively explore resources. Here again, professional development opportunities can provide the needed guided instructional opportunities.

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**On the (Male) Fringes:  
How Early Religious Women Remain “Subordinate” in World History Textbooks**

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**Abstract**

Second Wave feminist researchers identified male-dominated curriculum formats in late twentieth century curriculum materials. This study builds off their work and advances the conversation of women’s inclusion in current United States secondary world history textbook content via a feminist lens to determine the extent of women’s agency in the accounts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The purpose was to determine if textbooks portrayed these patriarchal religions as exclusively male, thereby presenting inaccurate portrayals of the religions and the agents involved, which directly violates NCSS Standards. This study used critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of female marginalization and omission, finding that modern textbooks still contain male-dominated content. This article concludes with pertinent information about early female religious leaders to promote more gender-balanced religious agency discussions in the classroom.

**Keywords:** Women’s agency, textbooks, Judaism, Christianity, Islam

The United States’ Women’s Movement of the 1960s and 1970s marked a wide-scale attempt to advocate for women’s rights, reproductive liberation, and the reduction of overtly patriarchal tones embedded in America’s formal curriculum (Ashcraft, 1998; Broudy, 1987; Kane, 1970; Lerner, 1986; Marcus, 1963; Spring, 2007). Feminists believed a more gender-balanced curriculum would benefit all students, especially females. They conducted studies on existing educational materials and sought out government financial aid for projects related to curriculum revision concerning the omission of women (Bernard-Powers, 1997).

Four decades later, this study follows a similar line of inquiry by exploring the degree to which women are included in twenty-first century secondary world history textbooks’ discussions of the patriarchal religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam since the Women’s

Movement. This topic has not been previously studied despite acknowledgement of women's omission in social studies texts since the 1970s (Trecker, 1971). Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were founded as patriarchal religions; however, they were not *exclusively male* domains as women held considerable influence over others, including males (Lerner, 1986; Meyers, 1988). Textbooks that communicate a "male exclusive" message leave students with an inaccurate understanding of gendered contributions during the formation of these religions as well as an inaccurate understanding of patriarchy. Additionally, by perpetrating the inaccurate view of women as passive spectators rather than as active change agents, textbooks may hinder students' successful understanding of culture and religion as outlined by the National Council for the Social Studies Standards (NCSS, 2010).

The purpose of this article is to assist educators in providing their students with a more holistic perspective of religious actors by showcasing how women have acted as religious change agents to gain a deeper understanding of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the following article I first provide an overview of this study and its findings before advancing existing conversations about women's omission and marginalization in social studies textbooks. Because I found that textbooks amply discussed male religious agents, I conclude by providing pertinent information about prominent female religious agents that educators may draw on when facilitating religious agency discussions with their students as they study Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

### **Women and Religion in Textbooks: The Odd Couple**

The push for women's inclusion in United States history textbooks has fueled many studies since the start of the Women's Movement. In writing this literature review, I searched for peer-reviewed resources (e.g., journal articles) including previous textbook content analyses published with the timeframe of 1950 to 2013 in academic databases like JSTOR, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, PantherCat, WorldCat, and Primo Central (Ex Libris) using combinations of the phrases "women's agency in textbooks," "female religious agency," "women in Judaism, Christianity, Islam," "religious leaders," and "world history textbooks". Using these search parameters, I identified approximately seventy-five potential resources, including twenty-three content analysis studies of United States secondary world history and/or United States history textbooks. Due to the scarcity of studies on the topic of women's religious agency in textbooks, I included four non-peer reviewed studies (Sewall, 1995; 2003; 2004; 2008) in the literature review to help contextualize this study within the existing conversations about religion in textbooks. Nineteen of the content analysis studies were especially pertinent to this study and the general criteria utilized in these analyses to determine the inclusion of women or of religions included: language; traditional roles or descriptions; and the page or line count afforded to the historical agent in these descriptions. To relate the findings in a succinct and meaningful manner, I began with the foundational work performed by Trecker (1971) concerning female representation and then reviewed the other studies in sequential decade format from the 1970s (Women's Movement) onward.

Concerning language, six studies conducted by four different authors reported results on female and/or male religious agency or religious representation in textbooks based on textual descriptions (Bellito, 1996; Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Jackson, 2011; Sewall, 1995; 2003; 2008).

These studies found that all of the textbooks included positive descriptions of the male religious leaders Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad such as religious/divine founder, preacher, holy book interpreter, teacher, political leader, military leader, and/or prophet (Bellito, 1996; Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Jackson, 2011; Sewall, 1995; 2003; 2008). Only two of these studies mentioned women - Hagar and Khadija - and only in Islam's emergence account (Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Sewall, 2008). Neither of the two studies focused on women, per se, although Khadija was described as the "older, wealthy" (Douglass & Dunn, 2003, p. 62) woman Muhammad married while Hagar was identified in textbooks in a pro-male, Eurocentric manner (Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Trecker, 1971) as "the wife of Abraham" (Sewall, 2008). Researchers who have studied women's agency (outside discussions about religion) have found that textbooks' employment of negative female stereotypes are enhanced by pro-male Eurocentric curriculum (Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Trecker, 1971). Specifically, Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) noted that textbook authors use socially constructed terms that reflect negative connotations, such as "crafty," to depict women, yet did not employ this type of language when describing men. Additionally, Trecker (1971) found that some textbooks devoted more space to describing the ideal, traditional woman's attributes than to describing the historic contributions real women, especially "radical" women, have made to the world.

In this same vein, over half of the fifteen studies that focused on women's agency in some capacity found that textbooks largely discussed women solely in traditional, secondary roles and these were compacted into just a few lines or sentences (Arlow & Froschel, 1976; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Greenberg, 1984; Osler, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Sewall, 2003; Schoeman, 2009; Weinbaum, 1979). Commeyras and Alvermann (1996), for example, identified how textbooks legitimized women's historical contributions by describing the women as spouses or mothers to male historical agents. Three of the studies identified these descriptions as typically being comprised of one or two sentences (a small passage at most) and housed under gender-specific headings such as Women's Suffrage (Arlow & Froschel, 1976; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Trecker, 1971). Additionally, multiple authors found that textbooks displayed women and their historic actions in contributionist boxes on textbook pages instead of embedding them in the main body text (Arlow & Froschel, 1976; Greenberg, 1984; Guhlanga, Chirimuuta, & Bhukuvhani, 2012; Osler, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Sewall, 2003; 2004; Trecker, 1971; Weinbaum, 1979).

Contributionist theory, commonly referred to as fragmentation or the contributionist method, occurred frequently in textbooks to appease Women's Movement activists who advocated against gender-biased textbooks. This method attempts to incorporate women's agency in texts by inserting a picture, vignette, or textbox on a page, thereby isolating the information and suspending it in a "fragmented" form from the main body content (Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1989; Sadker & Zittleman, 2007; Stalker, 1998; Trecker, 1971). The use of contributionist boxes allows textbook publishers to achieve the appearance of more balanced gender representation without actually including more women in the main text (Arlow & Froschl, 1976; Trecker, 1971; Weinbaum, 1979). This reflects a focus on the *quantity* of females in social studies textbooks rather than on the *quality or significance* of their actions (Woyshner, 2006). Trecker (1971) first documented this in her study where she noted, "[W]hen they are included, profiles and capsule biographies of women are often introduced in separate sections, apart from the body of the text. [...] ...it tends to reinforce the idea that women of note are, after all, optional and supplementary" (p. 251). Over two decades later, Osler's (1994) findings

echoed Trecker's (1971) work. Although Olser (1994) found that textbooks that have been published in more recent years have made "progress" in comparison to previous editions because they now had sections of women's history (p. 230), women's history was still being presented in a compartmentalized format. This type of format can ghettoize women's issues and only acknowledge women as "...a disadvantaged or subordinate group, and which also effectively denies gender as a dynamic of history" (p. 230-231).

Additionally, eleven of the fifteen studies that focused on women's agency in textbooks identified gender discrepancies in the textbook content (Arlow & Froschl 1976; Baldwin & Baldwin, 1993; Clark, Ayton, Frechette, & Keller, 2005; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Greenberg, 1984; Guhlanga et al., 2012; Jackson, 2011; R. Lerner, Nagai, & Rothman, 1991; Osler, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Sewall, 2003; 2004; Schoeman, 2009; Trecker, 1971; Weinbaum, 1979). The findings from these studies indicate that women are seemingly marginal or non-existent in textbook narratives. It is important to note here that out of all the content analysis studies found and reviewed, no study specifically addressed religious women's agency in secondary world history textbooks, indicating a literature void that the present study could help fill.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine and evaluate the extent of textbooks' discussion of the interwoven historical actions of women — specifically Sarah, Hagar, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Khadija, Fāṭima, and A'isha — and men (i.e., Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul, and Muhammad) that led to the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This research explored whether students could acquire a meaningful, multifaceted understanding of the male and female contributions involved in producing religion and constructing culture from the textbook, or if the textbook presented religious and cultural information as exclusively male domains. To make that determination, the following research questions guided this study: (1) What female-to-male text agency frequencies were evident?; (2) How were females qualitatively included and portrayed (i.e., full inclusivity, discussion/description extent of individuals, contribution box inserts) compared to males?; and (3) What types of gendered patterns regarding women's and men's religious roles emerged (i.e., "group" and "individual" descriptions and if agents were "passive" or "active")?

### **Methodology**

Feminist research served as the theoretical lens for this study because it focuses on "women's issues, voices, and lived experiences" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3) and this paradigm was also used in eight content analysis studies reviewed in the literature (Arlow & Froschl 1976; Clark et al., 2005; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Greenberg, 1984; Lerner et al., 1991; Osler, 1994; Trecker, 1971; Weinbaum, 1979). Second and third wave feminists share the goal of creating equality between the sexes through research and political transformations (Ashcraft, 1998; Evans, 1995; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Hoffman, 2001; Lerner, 1986; Mann & Huffman, 2005), so I decided to use feminist thought to ground this study. Offen (1988) provides a succinct and

relevant description of feminism, declaring that feminism serves as a method for analyzing the levels of cultural influence wielded by the sexes to determine where balance should be celebrated and where the presence of female societal subordination, due to male privilege, should be changed. Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) also used Offen's definition to ground their content analysis. Radical feminism further defines the scope of my study as it traditionally declares masculine society and patriarchal ideology as the origin of women's oppression (Ashcraft, 1998; Evans, 1995; Lerner, 1986; Meyers, 1988). Patriarchal ideology holds great relevance for this study as I am determining the extent of women's agency and contributions regarding the rise of religions traditionally perceived as exclusively male.

I used "agency" as an appropriate anthropological and feminist term that both anchored this study and connected it to previous applicable content analysis studies. From an anthropological perspective, agency consists of the study of why an individual choose to act in the manner they did, including what cultural influences might have contributed to the act(-ions) (Geertz, 1973). Feminist researchers Abu-Lughod (2008) and McNay (2000) define the term "agency" as an explanation of how gender identity is formed and potentially malleable in social contexts, especially concerning women's beliefs, actions, and contributions. In this feminist vein, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the work of Fairclough (2001), to identify gendered linguistic inferences regarding female and male agency and to determine if traditional patterns of female marginalization were present in the textbook sample. I purposefully chose to use Fairclough's work because it allowed me to analyze the data in relation to how linguistic inferences could resemble possible common-sense assumptions formulated by the reader (e.g., presentation of textual elements that could be interpreted as "exclusively male" by secondary students).

## Design

In this study, I sampled nine nationally available textbooks (Appendix A) and included texts adopted by Texas and California, states which have historically exerted strong influence on which textbooks are made nationally available by publishers (Florida School Book Depository, 2014; Jobrack, 2012; Ravitch, 2003; Texas Education Agency, 2013). The sample did not include all available secondary world history textbooks. Because I conducted this study alone, I independently coded and analyzed my sample set, which is atypical for a content analysis study. As I explain below, I performed an *a priori* and a Cohen's kappa statistic to ensure inter-rater agreement.

For the *a priori*, I reviewed four United States world religions textbooks, marketed both in the United States and internationally, in order to establish benchmarks for the analysis of the three religions' emergence accounts in the sample (Appendix B). For the Cohen's Kappa statistic, I recruited three faculty members from a Midwestern university to serve as religious experts and participate in a coefficient coder reliability statistic to ensure that my interpretations accurately represented the extent the textbook content included religious female agents and how they were portrayed and described in comparison to male agents. The Cohen's kappa tests yielded 100%, 93%, and 100% inter-rater reliability statistics.

## Data Collection and Analysis

To answer my researcher questions, I extracted quantitative and qualitative data from the following textbook components: the cover, table of contents, introduction pages, bibliographies and sections of the text where Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were discussed. Additionally, I coded corresponding chapter and/or section questions and any relevant pages discussing the religious historical agents in question according to gender and whether the agent was active or inactive. I established “active” and “inactive” criteria prior to the coding process. I coded a historical agent as “active” if s/he were engaged in activity (e.g., preaching, building, reading) and as “inactive” if not engaged. The agent was also “inactive” if: (1) the text referred to the agent in a possessive grammatical form (e.g., “son of,” “mother of,” “death of,” “birth of”); (2) the agent was a recipient or object rather than the subject of the action being performed (e.g., she “received” God’s message); and/or (3) an agent’s name appeared without supporting text to indicate engagement.

I created a gender comparative matrix to document my CDA coding and analysis process. I drew both quantitative and qualitative inferences from the data. Similar to the quantitative data Clark et al. (2005) collected, I calculated gender frequency counts by tallying the number of lines and pages upon which agents appeared, including text that accompanied imagery. I also employed qualitative microanalyses similar to those in the study by Commeyras and Alvermann (1996) to detect sexist language via CDA. Additionally, I determined whether each piece of data I reviewed supported the contributionist theory (Arlow & Froschl, 1976; Trecker, 1971; Weinbaum, 1979).

## Findings: Still “a Man’s” Religion

Overall, the findings indicated that all of the textbooks I sampled maintained the traditional content structure as an unequal representation of female-to-male textual lines and the descriptive portrayal of female agents as mostly inactive (yet males as mostly active). Additionally, I found that the textbooks I sampled largely described female agents according to their reproductive/sexual status and/or familial connections to a prominent religious male yet described male agents in leadership roles and non-domestic/non-familial occupations.

## Female-to-Male Agency Frequencies

The findings for research question one revealed three important conclusions regarding frequencies and frequency patterns. First, in *every* textbook, both Sarah and Hagar were absent in the emergence accounts of Judaism and Hagar was absent in the emergence accounts of Islam. Second, prominent males in the three religions received at least ten times more lines than prominent females and appeared on more pages than females in all textbooks. Third, the majority of textbooks portrayed women agents as overtly inactive and male agents as overtly active (Tables 1-2 and Appendix C).

## Social Studies Education Review

**Table 1. Text Cumulative Totals for Females**

Female Historical Agent	Total Textual Lines <i>(all books)</i>	Total Pages <i>(all books)</i>	Total Active Text Descriptions (%)	Total Inactive Text Descriptions (%)
Sarah	0	0	*	*
Hagar	0	0	*	*
Virgin Mary	97	52	24%	76%
Mary Magdalene	9	2	88%	12%
Khadija	22	16	72%	27%
Fāṭima,	15	11	13%	87%
A'isha	5	4	80%	20%

\* Indicates no information available

**Table 2. Text Cumulative Totals for Males**

Male Historical Agent	Total Textual Lines <i>(all books)</i>	Total Pages <i>(all books)</i>	Total Active Text Descriptions (%)	Total Inactive Text Descriptions (%)
Abraham	83	36	46%	54%
Moses	78	53	64%	36%
Jesus	630	227	48%	52%
Paul	116	34	82%	18%
Muhammad	819	225	60%	40%

### Qualitative Portrayal of Females v. Males

None of the textbooks I selected for my sample included qualitative portrayals of Sarah and Hagar. In all nine textbooks' accounts of Christianity, the text referred to Mary as "the Virgin" and/or "mother of Jesus" and described her in one or both of these roles. Experientially, these words emphasized her reproductive/sexual status and connection to Jesus, a prominent male figure in Christianity. The texts did not use any other words to define her historical agency. Mary Magdalene, mentioned in only two textbooks, was portrayed as either one of the women

who witnessed the death of Jesus (observer role) or inaccurately portrayed as a prostitute seeking penance, thereby defining her based on sexual status. The results further indicated that prominent Muslim women were qualitatively portrayed according to sexual or marital status as well. Textbooks consistently defined Khadija and A'isha relationally as wives of Muhammad and Fāṭima as Ali's wife. Relationally, possessive grammatical features also consistently linked Fāṭima to Muhammad (i.e., "Muhammad's daughter"). Only Khadija received additional descriptors such as "widow" and "wealthy" repetitiously which further defined her according to marital status but also experientially via financial status. Overall, the textbooks housed approximately 32 percent of women's agency in contributionist boxes (Appendix C).

In contrast, all textbooks used possessive grammatical structures (i.e., expressive verbs, nouns, and adjectives) when referencing the role male leaders played in the three major world religions. In Judaism, textbooks qualitatively described Abraham as a prophet, divine intermediary, and "father" of the Hebrews. Moses drew similar depictions as texts portrayed him as a leader and intermediary. In sections of the textbooks where Christianity was discussed, the textbook emphasized prominent Christian males' religious and political qualities and used positive expressive and experiential words like teachers, preachers, prophets, and the son of God (for Jesus) to position them. In textbooks, Peter was a (chief) apostle, missionary, disciple, and the first bishop of Christianity and often referred to as "the rock" of Jesus' church. Texts also consistently identified Paul as Jesus's apostle and expounded upon his missionary actions. In Islam, textbooks portrayed Muhammad as a teacher, preacher, prophet, and Messenger of God whose piety legitimized his role as a religious visionary and powerful political leader. The use of such titles and words that conveyed positive connotations regarding patriarchal ideology in the rise of Islam and additional discussions of how Muhammad linked his religion to the Abrahamic accounts further strengthened this concept.

The textbooks never used descriptors reciprocal to those used for women (e.g., "son of," "husband of," "the virgin") when referencing men. Rather, the descriptions of male agents emphasized their religious and political roles while also legitimizing the patriarchal belief of male divinity and male authenticity in positions of religious authority. Overall, textbooks housed approximately seven percent of men's agency in contributionist boxes (Appendix C).

### **Gendered Patterns in Religious Roles**

Individually, six textbooks portrayed the religious roles of women only in terms of their sexual and/or reproductive status (Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, & Shabaka, 2012; Craig, Graham, Kagan, Ozment, & Turner, 2011; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; Ellis & Esler, 2014; Judge & Langdon, 2012; Stearns, 2013). When textbooks acknowledged women by name, it was in relation to the woman's familial or reproductive connection to a male religious figure(s). In contrast, seven textbooks portrayed prominent men as having received the religious role of leader from a male deity (Beck et al., 2012; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; Ellis & Esler, 2014; Judge & Langdon, 2012; McKay, Hill, Buckler, Ebrey, Beck, Crowston, & Wiesner-Hanks, 2012; Stearns, 2013; Tignor, Adelman, Aron, Brown, Elman, Kotkin, Liu, Marchand, Pittman, Prakash, Shaw, & Tsin, 2011). Seven textbooks also utilized relational words and/or expressive grammatical features in their accounts about the emergence of Christianity and/or Islam that connected these religions to the Abrahamic accounts, thereby strengthening the authority of the male leaders (Craig et al., 2011; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; Ellis & Esler, 2014; Judge & Langdon, 2012; Smith, Van De Mieroop, & von Glahn, 2012; Stearns, 2013; Tignor et al., 2011).

Another pattern that surfaced in four of the textbooks was prominent religious men extending their religious message to women (Craig et al., 2011; McKay et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Stearns, 2013).

Eight of the nine textbooks portrayed prominent religious women as more inactive than prominent religious men; *The Heritage of World Civilizations* (Craig et al., 2011) served as the lone exception (Appendix C). All nine of the textbooks portrayed the prominent males as active historical change agents who either constructed or transformed their respective religion. The two ways this pattern emerged was through the frequent use of positively charged terminology that emphasized a male's leadership skills and via positive character references. The portrayal of Jesus, Paul, and Muhammad as "influential preachers or teachers" (Beck et al., 2012; Craig et al., 2011; Ellis & Esler, 2014; Judge & Langdon, 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Tignor et al., 2011), for example, and referring to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad via personality traits of "charismatic" men with strong "ethics" and "morals" (Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; McKay et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Stearns, 2013; Tignor et al., 2011).

As a collective whole, women's roles as a group were portrayed as subordinate to or under the direction of prominent religious men (Craig et al., 2011; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; Judge & Langdon, 2012; McKay et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Stearns, 2013; Tignor et al., 2011). This pattern emerged regardless of whether the women were engaged in activity, such as missionary work or offering financial assistance to male leaders (Ellis & Esler, 2014; McKay et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012), or passively obeying a male leader's instructions (Tignor et al., 2011). Additionally, these women were referenced as abstract nouns in the texts, such as "(early) female Christians" (Ellis & Esler, 2014; McKay et al., 2012; Stearns, 2013), "women" (Smith et al., 2012), or "wives" (Tignor et al., 2011) in lieu of other nouns like disciples, apostles, or converts; terms frequently used to describe men. No textbook referred to women as divine intermediaries, church mothers, or spiritual guides. For men as a collective whole, their roles in all three religions were communicated via specific titles that emphasized religious authority and authenticated their legitimacy in these positions (Beck et al., 2012; Craig et al., 2011; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013; McKay et al., 2012; Stearns, 2013; Tignor et al., 2011). Textbooks used descriptors like "prophets," "church fathers," and/or "caliphs" as male-exclusive terms and this illustrates the purposeful blocking of female participation in religious events (Beck et al., 2012; Craig et al., 2011; McKay et al., 2012).

### **Discussion: The Call to (Finally) Move beyond "Subordinate"**

The omission and marginalization of women's agency within the historical emergence accounts offered by textbooks leaves students unable to achieve proficient understandings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as the cultures related to those religions, all of which are part of important educational goals outlined in National Council for the Social Studies Standards (2010). Based on these findings, I encourage educators to reflect on how they are presenting religious history to their twenty-first century students, especially if students use textbooks regularly, since students may internalize the textbook as the "definitive" voice (hooks, 1989, p. 46) of "authoritative" knowledge (p. 48). In this vein and in consideration of this study's findings, history textbooks with traditional content structure might easily contribute to the emergence of stereotype threat regarding female students' self-concepts and their ability to

perform academically (Schmader & Johns, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The continual exclusion of women from religious history might also promote negative self-conceptualizations, encouraging students to “define or redefine” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797) themselves based on an identity framework void of religion and/or leadership. In the case of women’s omission and marginalization in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for example, detrimental academic and psychological effects could include female students’ (continual) regard of women as religious spectators, thereby reinforcing negative gender and cultural stereotypes that current females could not serve as religious leaders or active change participants (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1993).

Evidence of such negative effects have already emerged. Skirboll (1998) noted that the unbalanced gender pattern has become so ingrained within Western cultures that “many students believe women have never had, and cannot attain, significant social status and respect in society” (p. 169). Some believe that the continued omission of women as important historical agents has already detrimentally influenced girls’ perceptions of themselves and their capabilities (Brown, 2011; Sadker et al., 1989). Additionally, male students, and students as a collective whole, may interpret the absence of religious women leaders as a means for validating men’s dominant occupation of the religious sphere and as historical confirmation for voiceless females (Seguino, 2011; Sleeter & Grant, 2011).

### **Implications for Practice: How to Advance “the Gender” Conversation in the Classroom**

Rather than accepting textbook gender deficiencies, educators can expose students to non-stereotypic, mixed-gendered examples and integrate these into the curriculum to help repel the gender stereotypes found in traditional content (Good, Woodzicka, & Wingfield, 2010; Rios, Stewart, & Winter, 2010). Educators may also be able to help reduce gender stereotypes and prevent the possibility of stereotype threat and negative self-conceptualization by locating and using textbooks that showcase diverse role models (Rios et al., 2010). Presenting gender-balanced information affords students a more realistic perspective of the past and might even propel them to pursue positive self-identity searches and strengthen their self-esteem, especially for female and female-identifying students (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1993; Noddings, 1997).

In this study, for example, many of the actions and contributions of Sarah, Hagar, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Khadīja, Fāṭima, and A’isha promoted the rapid and successful emergence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Moreover, because of their pre-existing prestige and acknowledgement within their respective patriarchal religions today, incorporating the historical contributions of these women would not be a “subversive act” by educators, nor would it imply that educators are attempting to turn patriarchal religions into matriarchal ones. Rather, patriarchal religions do not, and should not, imply a “sans women” or “contributionist” message. The inclusion of women in the discussion of patriarchal religions - and specifically how they are continually situated within religious narratives - will more accurately portray diversified agency of women’s history in what Lerner (1975) describes as a “male-defined world” (p. 6). Their inclusion will also better foster students’ ability to conceptualize these religions and related religious events locally, nationally, and globally.

The results of this study evidenced that ample descriptions of male religious historical agents already exist in textbooks, therefore educators wishing to provide a

more holistic perspective for their students may use the following caveats on prominent religious women to initiate more gender-balanced discussions on the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such discussions should fulfill two purposes. They should serve as vehicles for teachers and students to collaboratively address how textbooks reinforce traditional (patriarchal) roles of women as “only” mothers or wives and help teachers and students advance their understanding of women as active historical change agents in *all* cultural aspects; thereby avoiding the “add women and stir” and “contributionist” pitfalls (Lerner, 1975; Schmeichel, 2014).

### **Prominent Women**

**Sarah and Hagar.** Without Sarah and Hagar, neither Judaism nor Islam would exist since the action of the male divine occurred on behalf of females as well as males (Niditch, 1998). Sarah and Hagar represent the first women to convert to the monotheistic religion of Abraham in the Hebrew account; their narrative describes the domestic and religious splintering that occurred between the two women due to ancient Hebrew cultural practices, such as polygamy. Their account also indicates the importance of women’s reproductive abilities within the dynamics of ancient Hebrew culture and the family unit. Becoming a mother marked a woman’s foothold in maintaining her cultural honor and security, although the primary wife often took measures to ensure her domestic power was not usurped (Bird, 1974; Teubal, 1990; Trible, 2003). In this account, God’s positive reinforcement of women’s domestic roles in Jewish society worked within the confines of the polygamous family dynamics to produce two mothers, both physically and religiously.

In the Jewish account, God affirmed the existing cultural framework for ancient Jewish women through the emphasis on Sarah’s role as primary wife and mother to the Hebrew/Jewish nation brought forth by Isaac’s descendants. Yet this (male) God also protected Hagar, who became mother to the Muslim nation rendered by Ishmael’s descendants, as a solution to the existing domestic competitiveness. Additionally, Hagar remains the first female to receive the divine promise of multiple descendants, a blessing typically reserved for patriarchs of Israel (Eskenazi & Weiss, 2008; Genesis 16:10; Trible, 1984), and she was the first biblical character to name God (Genesis 16:13; Trible, 1984).

**Mary, daughter of Anne.** Mary’s scriptural identifier as “the virgin mother” exemplified her acceptance of divine intervention (Luke 1:26-38, 46:55; Matthew 1:18-25; Qur’an 3:36, 14:132), and while a strong emphasis on Jewish women’s sexual status did exist during Mary’s time, it should not be her definitive descriptor. Mary, “the daughter of Anne” (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003, p. 468-470), became the first Christian disciple via motherhood and maintained active roles as mother (Luke 2:44-48), convert (Luke 2:34-35), and disciple (John 19:25-26). Additionally, Mary was (and continues to be) a powerful religious icon. Her inclusion and actions supporting Christianity helped create the foundation for the religion itself and her status has swelled over the centuries to the point that many people consider Mary a demi-goddess (Anderson & Zinsser, 1998). Throughout history, she has served as a representative of motherhood, purity, victory, consolation, and protection, as well as a female intercessor to whom mortal women could relate (Anderson & Zinsser, 1988; McNamara, 1996; Rubin, 2009; Wiesner-Hanks, 2010; Young, 1993).

**Mary Magdalene.** Mary of Magdala served as a devoted disciple and “holy woman who ministered to Jesus...” (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003, p. 285). She was favored by Jesus

above all others (*The Gospel of Mary*, 2006) and was one of the women (Luke 24:1-11; Matthew 28:1-10) — or the first disciple (John 20:14-18; *Gospel of Mary*; Mark 16:9-11) — to see Jesus resurrected. Her actions as a disciple, teacher, and preacher solidified the foundations of Christianity as much as, if not more than, the male disciples who appear in textbooks. According to *The Gospel of Mary* (2006), her status as “beloved one” indicated that her actions as a female preacher, prophetess, teacher, and Christian leader attributed to her unwavering acceptance and understanding of Jesus’ teachings. Mary’s occupation in these religious roles led the way for other religious women leaders in preceding centuries who worked as instructors of faith grounded in Christian scripture.

**Khadija.** As a wealthy Arab widow who sought Muhammad out as a husband, Khadija became his first wife, confidant, and supportive pillar in his religious journey. These roles define her as the first female follower of Islam and Muhammad’s first convert. Economically speaking, Khadija’s initial wealth came from her first husband, although she increased this wealth on her own via shrewd business investments before she hired and later married Muhammad (Mernissi, 2004). The economic stability Khadija provided *allowed Muhammad* to immerse himself in his religious revelations. Because Khadija accepted Islam, she was the primary source of comfort, confidence, and encouragement for Muhammad and, as the first disciple and confidant, she bore a share of the burden he encountered when spearheading this fledgling religion (Ahmed, 1992; Hāshimī, 2005; Ibn Hisham & Guillame, 1967; Mernissi, 1993; 2004; Stowasser, 1994; Young, 1993).

**Fāṭima.** Fāṭima’s positions as Muhammad’s daughter, a Muslim, and, later, as Alī’s wife, vaulted her socio-cultural status to one of great importance in Islam since Shī‘as believe Alī’s familial connections to Fāṭima helped justify his claim to the caliphate. More importantly, Shī‘as refer to Fāṭima as “the first lady of Islam and its most edifying model of womanhood” (Mernissi, 2004, p. 108). The perception of Fāṭima as an exemplar of appropriate social and religious actions for Muslim women has persisted over the centuries (Hāshimī, 2005) and the belief of her influence on the development of Islamic practices remains strong (Young, 1993). Shī‘a scripture refers to her as the “Lady of Light” and places her *in direct succession* after Muhammad, followed by her husband Alī (Yazdi & Ali, 1995). She reached the pinnacle of iconography in the tenth century when a Shī‘i man, al-Mahdi al-Fatimi, declared Fāṭima’s status as that of semi-divine and established an alternative caliph dynasty dubbed “the Fāṭimids” (Mernissi, 1993).

**A’isha.** As a child bride and the youngest of Muhammad’s wives, A’isha became not only the highly favored wife of the Prophet but also a devoted follower of Islam (Ahmed, 1992). Scholars credit her with recording, firsthand, between one and two thousand Hadīth (Ahmed, 1992; Ascha, 1995; Hāshimī, 2005; Young, 1993), collections of Islamic teachings that shed light on topics not discussed in the Qur’an, and they represent integral cultural resources for followers to consult about Muslim traditions (Ahmed, 1992; Guillaume, 1966; Hassan, 1999; Musa, 2008; Young, 1993). Because of her pious example and immense involvement with the Hadīth, A’isha became the first *faqeeha* (female jurist) in Islam and Muslims of high status solicited her input on Islamic fundamentals and interpretations of the Qur’an (Hāshimī, 2005). Additionally, accounts indicate that A’isha may have advanced into a position of political leadership as some historical sources describe civil strife between the fourth (Sunnī) and fifth (Shī‘a) caliphs during which she emerged as a Sunnī commander in the Battle of Camel (Ahmed, 1982; Ascha, 1995; Mernissi, 1993; 2004).

### **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, fifty years after the United States' Women's Movement, the inclusion of women in the religious accounts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam remains suppressed via omission and marginalization. Modern secondary world history textbooks continue to promote traditional content descriptions of prominent religious males as active founders and leaders (Bellito, 1996; Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Jackson, 2011; Sewall, 1995; 2003; 2008) while assigning prominent religious women Eurocentric descriptions that support a male hierarchy (Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Trecker, 1971), such as "wife of" and "virgin," or omitting the women completely. This echoes the findings of studies conducted on history textbooks within the same century and in the century prior. The foundational work by Trecker (1971) indicated that, "...authors tend[ed] to depict women in a passive role and distress that their lives are determined by economic and political trends" (p. 251). That trend continued through the decades as Schoeman (2009) noted that, "[M]ales were portrayed as active, assertive and curious, whereas females were portrayed as dependable, conforming and obedient" (p. 552).

Unfortunately, this study yielded similar findings. Because of the grossly unbalanced male to female line frequencies, overtly positive qualitative descriptions and textual portrayals of males, and continued pattern of showcasing males as active religious agents while positioning females as inactive agents, at best, textbooks are still failing to communicate an interwoven religious narrative of the historical actions of people of both genders. This prevents students from acquiring a meaningful, multifaceted understanding of the contributions male and female actors have made to help produce world religions and construct cultures. It also continues to portray religion falsely as an exclusively male domain.

I encourage educators to revisit the textbooks they are currently using with their students and take steps to identify and dispel any inaccurate views of women as passive spectators rather than as active change agents. In doing so, educators can more readily support their students' successful understanding of culture and religion as outlined in the National Council for the Social Studies Standards (2010). Promoting a more gender-balanced perspective of religious history will also help repel the potential encroachment of stereotype threat and negative self-conceptualization upon students, especially those students who identify as female.

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**APPENDIX A**

Reference List of Secondary World History Textbook Sample

- \*Beck, R., Black, L., Krieger, L., Naylor, P., & Shabaka, D. (2012). *World History: Patterns of Interaction*. Holt McDougal Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, FL: Orlando.
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- \*\*Judge, E. & Langdon, J. (2012). *Connections: A World History*. Pearson, NJ: Upper Saddle River.
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- Smith, B.G., Van De Mieroop, M., & von Glahn, R. (2012). *Crossroads and Cultures: A History of the World's Peoples* (Vols. I & II). Boston, MA: Bedford, Freeman, & Worth.
- Stearns, P. N. (2013). *World History in Brief: Major Patterns of Change and Continuity, combined volume*. (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Tignor, R., Adelman, J., Aron, S., Brown, P., Elman, B., Kotkin, S., Liu, X., Marchand, S., Pittman, H., Prakash, G., Shaw, B., & Tsin, M. (2011). *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- \* *Indicates Florida Adoption Board selection*
- \*\* *Indicates Texas Adoption Board selection*

**APPENDIX B**

Bibliography of World Religions Textbooks Reviewed for A priori & Information Gleaned

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Molloy, M. (2013). *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, challenge, and Change* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill

Young, W.A. (2013). *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

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**APPENDIX C**

**Cumulative Textual Quantitative Findings for Female & Male Agents in Judaism, Christianity, & Islam in Textbook Sample**

Textbook (Author, Year Published)	Total Textual Lines	Total Lines in Contrib. Box	Total Content in Contrib. Box (%)	Total Textbook Pages	Total Active Descriptions (%)	Total Inactive Descriptions (%)
World History: Patterns of Interaction (Beck et al., 2012)	13	1	7%	8	38%	62%
	276	4	1%	87	56%	44%
The Heritage of World Civilizations (Craig et al., 2011)	43	28	65%	16	79%	21%
	338	34	10%	129	36%	64%
World History (Duiker & Spielvogel, 2013)	15	6	40%	10	13%	87%
	244	13	5%	95	61%	39%
World History (Ellis & Esler, 2014)	12	0	*	9	50%	50%
	250	35	14%	73	56%	44%
Connections: A World History (Judge & Langdon, 2012)	16	0	*	10	25%	75%
	313	33	10%	111	78%	22%
A History of World Societies (McKay et al., 2012)	16	0	*	12	37.5%	62.5%
	274	0	*	97	60%	40%
Crossroads and Cultures: A History of the World's Peoples (Smith et al., 2012)	39	19	48%	16	17%	83%
	184	15	8%	66	46%	54%
World History in Brief: Major Patterns of Change and Continuity (Stearns, 2010)	3	0	*	3	33%	67%
	113	29	25%	41	64%	36%

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Worlds Together, Worlds Apart (Tignor et al., 2011)	7	0	*	4	57%	43%
	171	4	2%	76	60%	40%
TOTAL – ALL TEXTBOOKS	164	54	32%	88	38%	62%
	2163	167	7%	775	57%	43%

\* Indicates no information available

Purple shading denotes cumulative female quantitative findings in text

Brown shading denotes cumulative male quantitative findings in text

**About the Author**

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**Social Studies in a Flash: Teaching Flash Nonfiction  
in a High School Social Studies Classroom**

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**Abstract**

The focus of this article provides support for teachers to incorporate authentic writing and promote historical thinking through a flash nonfiction unit-of-study. The author draws from her experiences teaching and researching flash nonfiction in a ninth grade social studies classroom. Mentor texts suggestions, student comments, and examples will be provided.

**Keywords:** writing; historical thinking; nonfiction; social studies; high school

**Introduction**

Over the last thirty years, teachers are recognizing the importance in teaching writing (Applebee & Langer, 2011). In the past decade, students in schools are writing more in all subjects. However, the writing consists of shorter lengths of writing, such as filling in leftover material on worksheets and summaries, which replicate the many high-stakes tests students will complete during the year but of less length (Applebee & Langer 2009; 2011). According to Applebee and Langer (2011), most assignments given of written work across the content areas consist of fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and copying information, while only 20.9% represent extended writing of a paragraph or more.

Furthermore, students are receiving little writing instruction. Across all content areas, instruction in writing equaled 2 hours and 22 minutes over a nine-week period (Applebee & Langer, 2011). When instruction did occur, it primarily focused on prewriting strategies, process writing, and writer's workshop in English classrooms, with instruction in these categories decreasing in other content areas (Applebee & Langer 2009; 2011). Teaching writing should be included in every content area, not just reserved to language arts. In particular, content area writing instruction in social studies, for example, can assist teachers to include more informational texts as well as research writing standards. According to Boyer (2006), "Social studies is ripe with content that students can effectively explore through writing" (p. 160).

According to Monte-Sano (2012a), writing essays can improve students' mastery in history as well as promote historical thinking (Monte-Sano, 2012b).

Unfortunately, writing is less frequent due to time requirements to prepare students for high-stakes testing (Rief, 2006; Ruben & Moll, 2013). High-stakes testing has interfered with writing instruction since teachers may feel that they need to prepare students with test taking skills that counteract the writing process (Applebee & Langer, 2009; 2011; Crawford, Lloyd, & Knoth, 2008; Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdés, 2004; Rief, 2006; Ruben & Moll, 2013).

For example, approximately 81% of teachers noted that high-stakes testing would play a role in students' lives during the school year (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Test preparation places time constraints on teachers' writing instruction and the way assignments are given (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Test preparation also leads to writing that is less about ways to learn and generate new understanding about the world and more about the way to write for a test (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Ruben & Moll, 2013). Instead, structural concerns and the "correct" way to respond to narrow writing prompts have become more commonplace in the classroom due to high-stakes testing pressure (Ruben & Moll, 2013).

Instead of "test prep" writing, there are numerous benefits for students to engage in authentic writing, especially in the social studies classroom. Research indicates that writing in the social studies has many benefits, such as understanding content and social studies skills while also enhancing literacy skills (Boyer 2006; Street & Stang, 2008). Purposeful writing helps create new understandings for students by acting and reflecting on their existing experiences and knowledge (Baker, Barstack, Clark, Hull, Goodman, Kook, & Kraft, 2008). Writing encourages metacognition (Baker et al., 2008; LaBonty & Williams, 2008). Writing also enhances creativity, imagination, and allows students to think about the world around them (Rief, 2006). Furthermore, Monte-Sano (2012b) noted "teaching writing does not have to mean giving up on, or compromising, the teaching of history" (p. 294). In fact, promoting writing in social studies, for example, can assist students in developing a deeper understanding of the subject (Monte-Sano, 2012b).

The focus of this article provides support for social studies teachers to incorporate authentic writing and promote historical thinking in the social studies classroom through a flash nonfiction unit of study. Flash nonfiction is a genre that relies on a maximum word count of 750 words while at the same time providing similar elements found in traditional short nonfiction. While other research centering on writing in social studies has been conducted through a disciplinary literacy lens (see Moje; Monte-Sano; Shanahan & Shanahan), such as constructing historical arguments, the goal of this article is to provide readers with a writing unit integrated within an instructional social studies unit in order to help students promote historical thinking through writing flash nonfiction. As a former social studies teacher and now teacher educator, I draw from my recent experience teaching flash nonfiction in a ninth grade social studies classroom centering on the Industrial Revolution. Mentor texts suggestions, student comments, and examples will be provided.

### **What is Flash Nonfiction?**

The brief essay has taken on a genre of its own: flash nonfiction. However, this genre encompasses many sub-genres, such as memoir, informative, argumentative, to name a few. While many authors of flash nonfiction have a difficult time weighing down the genre with a strict definition, most agree that a maximum word count of 750 words is a good

perimeter. More importantly, however, is the essence of flash nonfiction: the human connection or as Beckel and Rooney (2012) call it, “The writer’s experience of the world made small and large at the same time” (p. xi). Flash nonfiction calls for an in-depth connection to the human condition. The reader must walk away from the piece obtaining a better sense of self (or humanity) from it, which is a natural fit in the social studies classroom. Good flash writing contains a piece of the personal that stands alone. Typically, a good flash piece will linger with the reader for days after reading it, even though it only took five minutes to read.

### **Benefits of Using Flash Nonfiction in the Social Studies Classroom**

Flash nonfiction in the social studies classroom offers students meaningful and purposeful reading and writing experiences. For example, numerous flash nonfiction pieces can be read and reread through multiple close readings since they are short pieces. Close readings, which are critical analyses of text specifically honing in on craft, form, and meaning, encourage students to notice authors’ intentional writing decisions that they can emulate in their own writing (Batchelor & King, 2014) as well as hone in on structure. They can mine these texts for recognition of how various authors establish conviction of an historical topic and how they establish credibility in a nonfiction setting. For example, students can notice a particular technique an author uses in a piece during their first close reading of a flash piece, and then during a second close reading of the same piece, students can then recognize how the nonfiction topic comes to life via the technique.

In combination with close reading, flash nonfiction assists students in learning social studies concepts and content because it makes the content more purposeful and approachable for them. By having students then write flash nonfiction regarding these topics, they will move beyond what Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) called mere knowledge telling and instead transform their newfound understanding and awareness into their own words, making history personal. For example, social studies teachers can bring in historical events that connect to the human condition, such as the piece about September 11th by Brian Doyle entitled “Leap” (2012). In this piece, Doyle focuses on witness accounts of people who jumped from the Twin Towers speculating who these people were in relation to each other, since one witness observed two people holding hands while jumping, which became the central focus of the piece.

Flash nonfiction is also a great way to gather students’ writing samples and monitor progress throughout the year to gain insight into students’ strengths and challenges as writers. Flash nonfiction allows students to write within a framework in the social studies classroom that includes freedom to choose topics, writing for real audiences, and using writing models, also known as mentor texts (Graham & Perin, 2007). Mentor texts, such as “Leap” mentioned above, provide concrete examples of the genre’s text structure and discourse surrounding it. Using mentor texts also provides students a real-world experience of the reading-writing connection. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **Teaching a Two-week Unit of Flash Nonfiction**

I worked with a ninth grade social studies teacher, Carrie, (all names including the school are pseudonyms) in a high school outside of San Francisco, California for a two-week unit on flash nonfiction. Bay High School, a public urban school, serves about 1,300 students where student demographics consist of 40% White, 26% Latinx, 21% Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islander, and 2% African American. The rest of the population identifies as “two or more races.”

Prior to coming to the school, Carrie (a former 7th grade social studies student of mine) engaged her students in a unit on the Industrial Revolution in England, specifically, and connected it to contemporary global current events. This particular social studies class centered on general world history with a specific focus on social justice. For example, since many of her students identify as Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander, Carrie felt it was important to create a unit centered on students’ cultures when it came time to discuss World War II and paid particular attention to events in the Pacific that may get neglected from traditional curriculum. However, Carrie is in a relatively unique position since she teaches in a school that allows flexibility and freedom for teachers to linger longer within units; because of this flexibility, she devoted two weeks to teaching the Industrial Revolution through a variety of texts, such as with multimedia, primary source documents, photographs, and readings addressing counter-narratives.

Carrie believes in connecting historical events and eras to contemporary society for her students. Throughout the year, the social studies curriculum at Carrie’s school focuses on discussing issues of inequity. They put great effort into discussing how race, gender, age, ability, sexuality, etc. are present in students’ lives today and how they factor into and/or come from different historical eras, such as the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, numerous Socratic seminars were included throughout this unit, such as addressing both pros and cons of child labor in developing countries and environmental issues regarding pollution since students live in a “Green” area that values conservation and recycling.

Toward the end of the Industrial Revolution unit, Carrie informed students that they should choose a small aspect of the Industrial Revolution that interested them after engaging in their Socratic seminars and then research it independently. We related this idea to narrowing in on a research topic as thinking in terms of using a magnifying glass. Carrie gathered various nonfiction articles for students to peruse and provided websites that could assist them in multiple topics. Many students were fascinated with the labor conditions of children and focused on that for their research. During the unit, the lead-in to child labor was looking at the need for human resources in an industrialized economy. Specifically, they looked at it through gender inequality and age inequality lenses to compare how that reflected how society was structured. Since these were ninth graders (age 14-15), many of them felt connected to this issue, placing themselves in various children’s shoes they read about during the unit via quotes and primary sources discussing the issue of children’s health in factories. They would respond to primary sources by writing a “quickwrite” reflection in their journals as if they were the children in the conditions they read about and discussed.

Students were informed they would be writing flash nonfiction to represent their historical understanding of their chosen topic, and none of the 28 students I worked with had heard of the genre. Based on this information, I began the unit by reading aloud the Doyle piece “Leap.” Students were asked to read along and “stalk” sentences. This meant they were to underline any sentence, phrase or moment that 1) stood out to them that they would like to model

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in their own writing; 2) was aesthetically pleasing; or 3) grabbed them/gave them a “gut” reaction. I then explained how this is called “reading like a writer.”

Students were given writer’s notebooks and asked to jot down lines they stalked. They shared them on the document camera and transferred their favorite lines to a piece of butcher paper to keep on the wall as future reference. They called this paper “Noticing and Naming.” Asking students what they notice in a piece of writing is crucial for them to understand the techniques authors use in a particular genre. When they see repetition of the technique over multiple pieces, they are able to name the technique. (See Figure 1 for a list of techniques noticed in flash nonfiction.) Students take ownership in their learning and will be more inclined to use the techniques they named and noticed in their own writing. Stalking sentences allows students to model and practice and play with these techniques.

**Figure 1. Flash nonfiction’s “Toolbox of Techniques”.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Titles</li> </ul>	Get the reader’s attention even before they begin reading your story through your title. The more unusual, the more it will appeal to your reader. Keep it short and sweet!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads</li> </ul>	Purposefully worded, leads drive the reader right into the action of the story. The first sentences capture the reader’s attention and make them ask questions about what is happening in the story.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point-of-View</li> </ul>	Many times, writers of flash nonfiction choose first person point-of-view because the main character (or self) can narrate through his/her thinking, which drives the plot forward. Second person point-of-view where the writer addresses “you”, the reader, can also be effective for its novelty. Third person is also powerful in nonfiction!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprise Twists</li> </ul>	Many authors use the “shock” technique at the end of their flash nonfiction pieces. The element of surprise works in this genre and readers want to be left with something to ponder. A surprise in the plot can be effective.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topics</li> </ul>	Topics must represent the human condition in successful flash nonfiction pieces. Depth is needed despite the brevity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding Back Info</li> </ul>	Hemingway’s theory of omission holds true in flash nonfiction; only show “an eighth of the iceberg” to the reader. What is not said (or written) is far greater than what is penned on paper.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unusual Format/Setup</li> </ul>	Readers want the shock of the unexpected. By creating your flash nonfiction story in a non-traditional format, it will not only grab their attention, but they will appreciate the creativity and variety of the read.

For example, students noticed that Doyle’s piece contained specific names of people who had witnessed people jumping from the towers during 9/11. Below is an excerpt from “Leap” from *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction* (2012):

Tiffany Keeling saw fireballs falling that she later realized were people. Jennifer Griffin saw people falling and wept as she told the story. Niko Winstal saw people free-falling backwards with their hands out, like they were parachuting. (62)

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Ted (students chose their own pseudonyms) wrote and researched the stock market crash in 2008, linking it to the Industrial Revolution. Below is an excerpt of his piece modeling after “Leap” regarding the use of real people and companies as well as the repetition of the word “bankrupt” similar to Doyle’s intentional repetition of “falling”:

On September 15, 2008, Lehman Brothers Holding Inc. goes bankrupt, becoming the largest bankruptcy in history. Eleven days later, Washington Mutual goes bankrupt. Bear Stearns goes bankrupt. During this time, numerous other companies such as Merrill Lynch, AIG, Freddie Mac, HBOS, Royal Bank of Scotland, Bradford & Bingley, Fannie Mae, Fortis, Hypo and Alliance & Leicester were hanging on by a thread, receiving billions of tax dollars just to survive.

This repetition proved to resonate with students and became powerful passages in their writing. For example, Kili described the wealthy versus the poor during the time of the Industrial Revolution with the repetition of the word “people” intentionally using incomplete sentences as Doyle did in his nonfiction piece. Her excerpt is below:

People with golden pearl hair and corseted, detailed dresses. People with scars and bruises, with dishwater brown hair. People carrying all of their belongings, and all of their children, wounded from working in the factories.

When discussing “Leap”, one student commented, “This one stuck with me because it was very eye-opening. It was interesting how much I learned and the way it was written.” Alice concurred, “Leap lingered with me the most because the writing was so impactful and relates to a very real tragedy that has happened. The witness accounts were so sad and how he described the two people leaping was so impactful to me.” Shellie admitted, “Halfway through I started crying.”

Other mentor texts were read (see Figure 2 for a list of suggested mentor texts) and discussed over the first week of the 10-day unit, such as “Dumber than” by Lee Martin (2012), which focuses on Martin’s brother’s life with an unexpected twist ending. With this mentor text, I asked students to think up colloquialisms like “dumber than a box of rocks...” that were commonly repeated in their family and/or culture. One student mentioned that in Russian culture, they often use the phrase, “Love is a carrot.” Another student, Ted, said his family also uses an unusual phrase: “The cake is a lie.” The class shared possible meanings for these phrases. Then they began a quick write about the topic. Each day, after a mentor text had been read and discussed, students were asked to begin a story as a quick write in their journals centering on techniques they pulled from reading the text as well as use a “stalked sentence” as a lead to begin their writing. This allowed students to get experience with practicing what they noticed in their writing.

### **Figure 2. Flash Nonfiction Mentor Texts Used.**

Doyle, B. (2012). Leap. In D. W. Moore (Ed.), *The rose metal press field guide to writing flash nonfiction: Advice and essential exercises from respected writers, editors, and teachers*, (61–63). Brookline, MA: Rose Metal Press.

Gonzalez, R. (2012). Toy soldier. In D. W. Moore (Ed.), *The rose metal press field guide to writing flash nonfiction: Advice and essential exercises from respected writers, editors, and teachers*, (35-36). Brookline, MA: Rose Metal Press.

Lenney, D. (2012). Little black dress. In D. W. Moore (Ed.), *The rose metal press field guide to writing flash nonfiction: Advice and essential exercises from respected writers, editors, and teachers*, (102-104). Brookline, MA: Rose Metal Press.

- Martin, L. (2012). Dumber than. In D. W. Moore (Ed.), *The rose metal press field guide to writing flash nonfiction: Advice and essential exercises from respected writers, editors, and teachers*, (68-69). Brookline, MA: Rose Metal Press.
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After four days of reading mentor texts and practicing techniques in their own writing, students brought in research they gathered on their topic surrounding the Industrial Revolution. Before beginning writing, Carrie and I first asked students to share their ideas about their research with their writing groups (4-5 students). Myhill & Jones (2009) suggest that discussion before writing is like a rehearsal to writing.

Writing time in class is important in this endeavor. Therefore, the next three days were devoted to writing. The mentor texts became “personal assistants” in helping them craft their flash nonfiction pieces. Instead of saying, “I don’t know what to write about,” or “I don’t know how to get started,” students referred to the mentor texts as guides, building their self-esteem as writers. Little guidance was needed from Carrie or me. Additionally, we held writing conferences with each student, lasting anywhere from 2 – 5 minutes, inquiring what was working with their piece as well as where they thought they needed help. They were able to share their writing with their peers in their writing groups as well, which also offered feedback.

Two days were devoted to revision, and these revisions were based on peer feedback, personally initiated changes, and teacher conference input. The end of the unit culminated in a typed, printed draft. Students shared their pieces with the entire class in an “author’s chair” setting, which is when a writing piece is considered in finished or final draft form and can be read in front of peers, typically on a stool or chair in the front of the classroom in order to receive feedback. After hearing each piece, classmates shared “staked sentences” they liked and techniques that they noticed in the piece. Additionally, these final drafts were bound into a class anthology, which was placed in the classroom library as well as their high school library. (See Table 1 for a timeline overview of the unit). Again, Carrie is in a unique position where she can extend her unit to include a two-week writing unit. For teachers who have a much more restricted or limited timeframe, teaching flash nonfiction can be modified to include having students write and revise at home instead of during class time. Additionally, teachers can teach a flash nonfiction writing unit as part of a project-based learning unit instead of waiting until the end. This can be accomplished by including flash nonfiction mentor texts that address the topic in some way, which can be shared and studied at the beginning of each class period.

**Table 1. Steps for Teaching Flash Nonfiction within a Social Studies Unit.**

<b><u>Prior to Beginning Flash Nonfiction:</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate informational articles centering on social studies topic being studied or self-selected by students. Share research via discussions as whole class/small group.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week One:</u></b>
<b>Days 1 – 4:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and discuss flash nonfiction mentor texts. (After reading each mentor text, students engage in noticing and naming elements that make each flash piece unique. Record these responses on butcher paper as a reference guide. Have students practice a craft element used in the mentor text in their writer’s notebook.)</li> </ul>
<b>Day 5:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students begin drafting their own flash nonfiction piece based on the topic they researched, incorporating the techniques from mentor texts.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Week Two:</u></b>
<b>Days 1 – 2:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students continue drafting their flash nonfiction piece. They share writing with teacher via writing conferences and in small group writer’s workshop with peers.</li> </ul>
<b>Days 3 – 4:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students reread and revise their draft based on individual interest, teacher feedback via conferences, and peer responses in writing groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Day 5:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students share their (typed) final drafts via author’s chair while peers compliment and notice the author’s intentional decisions used in the piece.</li> </ul>

**Students’ Flash Nonfiction Topics**

Overwhelmingly, students wrote about tragic events centering on youth labor, deplorable working conditions in factories, and the destruction of nature that corresponded with industrial growth, all of which were discussed at great length via an inequity lens of how they exist, rather than why they exist. Below is the introduction of Penelope’s flash nonfiction piece, which shares her concern for all of the above. She specifically chose to separate her sentences in a poem fashion without punctuation. She also uses the intentional repetition of “before,” which highlights that she is taking risks in her writing as well as creatively playing with her writing. Carrie and I chose this piece, in particular, because we wanted to highlight the power of flash nonfiction where part of the author’s goal in flash nonfiction is to have dramatic impact and leave the reader contemplating and really evaluating humanity. We believe this piece shows that it is much more powerful to juxtapose a river and a man to industrialization as a whole.

Before  
 Before everything  
 Before giant industries cut down giant trees  
 Before the grass was ripped and torn out  
 Before the water was used for more than just drinking  
 Before machines ate children

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Before disease swept away families  
Before humans made their mark on the Earth  
Before it all  
There was a man and a river  
The way it should be and should've stayed  
The way it will never be again  
Ever again  
Before the world turned black and grey and the color faded away  
Before money and soot ruled the world

Others invented techniques, such as Mike's flash nonfiction piece entitled, "Just Another Nobody." Below is an excerpt told in first-person point-of-view, as if he is the factory worker working in a contemporary, globalized economy:

Name: Does it even matter? ID Tag: 533407. Number of days worked: countless. Amount of money made per hour: less than \$5. Number of quality products made: 0. Number of unsatisfied customers: All of them. Number of injuries received: 4. Number of mouths I need to feed: 3. Number of people I have seen die: 7. Amount of rights I have: 0. Number of mistakes allowed: 0. Number of mistakes I have made: 1. Number of arms I have left: 0. Number of jobs I have left: 0.

When discussing his piece, Mike said the following:

This story is about a guy working in a factory and he loses his arm in an accident, and it's like a little resumé of all the stuff he does. It gets really dark, like he's making phones, so I'm trying to get the reader to see what the aftermath is, what his time at the factory is like, and what it's done to him and what he had to suffer just to make phones for us... because in many parts of the world, working conditions are no better than what they were during the Industrial Revolution.

Mike's and Penelope's excerpts above reveal the importance of writing in the social studies classroom. For example, Mike's comparison of factory life in present day to the Industrial Revolution is commendable; however, his portrayal of it using flash nonfiction and the techniques he borrowed from mentor texts provides more of a heartfelt message that perhaps a research paper or essay might have missed. Flash nonfiction gave voice to his topic.

### Conclusion

When asked if students enjoyed writing flash nonfiction, comments included, "Yes! I thought it was great to represent the Industrial Revolution in a way that's not an essay." Mike agreed, "I love it! You can be dark and mysterious with the writing while also connecting to the human condition on something historical." Regarding the significance of using flash nonfiction writing in a social studies classroom, this genre provides students with engaging, topical issues while deepening the human condition we all share throughout history. It also allows students to take risks and think of writing as a creative endeavor across all subject areas.

More importantly, students were able to see themselves in the historical context surrounding their research. Flash nonfiction allowed students to write themselves into the narrative, to make history come alive through their own voices. By the same token, the challenge that remains for social studies teachers is finding that balance between general and discipline-specific needs in order to satisfy what the content demands.

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However, flash nonfiction could be that tool to not only promote historical thinking, research, reading, and writing skills, but also intertwine them all into a meaningful literacy experience in the social studies classroom.

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