The Illusion of Inclusion: A Critical Race Theory Textual Analysis of Race and Standards

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In this article, Julian Vasquez Heilig, Keffrelyn Brown, and Anthony Brown offer findings from a close textual analysis of how the Texas social studies standards address race, racism, and communities of color. Using the lens of critical race theory, the authors uncover the sometimes subtle ways that the standards can appear to adequately address race while at the same time marginalizing it—the “illusion of inclusion.” Their study offers insight into the mechanisms of marginalization in standards and a model of how to closely analyze such standards, which, the authors argue, is increasingly important as the standards and accountability movements continue to grow in influence.

Mainstream education reform discourse today demonstrates an obsession with standards, tests, and accountability. The recent fruition of the Common Core State Standards as nationwide academic benchmarks is an example of the momentum to centralize educational policy. In the 1990s Governor George W. Bush was a progenitor of systemic reform through his support for the alignment of standards to high-stakes testing and accountability in Texas (McNeil, 2005). A major theory of action underlying the Texas accountability model of school reform is that standards create more equitable opportunities for learning (Vasquez Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). This was an impetus behind the push toward state standards in Texas and elsewhere in the 1990s (Paige, 2006) as well as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Yet some school reform and policy scholars have critiqued this notion of equality and instead recognize standards as political (Apple, 1992, 1999) and
ideological (Sleeter, 2002, 2003; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). Given this reality, it is important to look closely at the racial politics and ideologies embedded in modern standards, which shape the information presented in textbooks and are now increasingly aligned to high-stakes testing. In response to this need, this study looks at the revised Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards as codified in the decadal Texas standards-building process.

Drawing from critical race theory (CRT), we provide a careful textual examination of the quantity and quality of racial knowledge found in the current social studies standards. This level of analysis is vital to broadening the existing literature because it highlights the nuanced ways in which inclusion and exclusion occur in the context of educational standards. Just as Apple (2000) has shown that the neoconservative restoration has been quite apt at appropriating the discourse of equity—thus making policies that are not in the interests of groups of color appear to make “good sense” in addressing their needs—we contend that without an in-depth analysis of the subtleties of the standards, they could appear as equitable while in reality they remain problematic. If we take the approach that standards policy is politically and racially driven but do not account for the concrete ways knowledge is constructed by such interests, we will never fully unveil the complexities of racialized curriculum exclusion.

The findings from this study have the potential to provide new ways to think about standards policy analysis for historically underserved communities. For example, while curriculum theorists (Apple, 1992; Sleeter, 2002) have cogently explained that standards are tied to ideological interests that create absences and overgeneralizations, few of these studies tell us much about what is actually in the standards in terms of the representations of groups of color.

We acknowledge that this article cannot examine the social studies standards debate from every angle. For example, the politics of the standards process in Texas has been hotly debated and analyzed elsewhere in mass media, film documentaries, Web sites, edited books, and journal articles, such as Emilio Zamora’s statement in Bledsoe and Cardenas (2010) and on the Web sites of the Center for History Teaching and Learning and George Mason University’s History News Network. However, this article does not attempt to wade deep into the political process by which the standards were adopted. We do recognize that many academics, community members, and interest groups protested, analyzed, testified, and sought to create a public discourse to influence the standards process. They were successful in helping to get many of the most egregious revisions expunged, such as the replacement of slavery in all Texas textbooks with the words “Atlantic triangular trade.” However, an extended discussion about the unique political context in Texas relative to the standards is beyond the purview of our textual analysis. Furthermore, we also do not consider here the use of standards—what teachers actually do with them in the classroom. We believe that teachers have agency to render the standards beyond what is codified notwithstanding their alignment with high-stakes testing. We believe there are teachers across the state of Texas with the
expertise to address race in the curriculum despite the standards. Nevertheless, the implementation of standards in the classroom is also beyond our textual analysis of the current TEKS U.S. history social studies standards.

In the discussion that follows, we begin with a review of the literature on systemic reform, standards, and high-stakes testing. We then focus on the history of limitations and biases in recent standards-based educational policy reforms for groups of color. We follow this with an overview of the theoretical frameworks used to guide this study: critical race theory in education (Bell, 1993; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1997) and critical theories of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Guinier & Torres, 2002; Omi & Winant, 1994). We use CRT and critical theories of race because race is still an important analytical lens for making sense of the macro context of educational policy. Apple (1999) argued that it is not possible to fully understand the history, the current status, and the multiple effects of current educational policy without placing race at the core of one’s analysis. As a result, our main research question is: What are the nuanced and subtle ways in which race and racism are represented in the social studies standards in Texas?

We then present a careful textual analysis of the second generation of Texas eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies TEKS adopted by the state board of education in 2010. (The first generation of TEKS were in use from 1997 to 2010.) We highlight that while there are a modest number of TEKS specifically addressing the history of African Americans and Latinos, Native American and Asian American histories remain largely invisible. We also concur with the predominant discussion in the public discourse that the TEKS include a disturbing binary between standards that are required and optional. The second part of our analysis focuses on how knowledge is represented in the recently adopted social studies TEKS. Significant to the findings in this analysis is the subtle manner in which race and racism are simultaneously acknowledged and obscured. We examine how the standards have articulated and framed the histories and involvement of groups of color in the U.S. historical narrative and find that they are lacking in important and vital ways. The article concludes with a discussion of these findings and the implications that these findings have for policy makers and K–12 schooling nationwide.

A New Era for the Curriculum Knowledge Debate?
The growth of state-mandated standards in the 1990s reignited long-standing debates around curriculum. Banks (1993) argued that there are perpetually heated and divisive national disputes surrounding what knowledge related to ethnic and cultural diversity should be taught in schools. In the 1990s, neonativists engaged in a “cultural war” to actively delimit multicultural perspectives in the social studies standards. They sought to carefully control the framework writing and textbook adoption processes in California, New York, Texas, and elsewhere (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Salvucci, 1992). Neo-nativists also
stirred public opinion by framing the multicultural education debate “with catchy but simplistic slogans and divisive codes,” such as “ethnic cheerleading” and “self-esteem pablum” (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995, p. 35). These attacks did not go unchallenged as activists and scholars nationwide sought to problematize the state education agencies’ control over the centralization of social studies knowledge (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Salvucci, 1992).

When the social studies TEKS came up for revision in 2010, these issues again took center stage, with renewed neonativist attacks on multicultural perspectives. Is the social studies TEKS debate in Texas simply a rehashing of the cultural wars of the 1990s and earlier? It is true that the knowledge included in the curricular canon has always been politicized (Zimmerman, 2002). However, in important ways, the systemic reform is now embedded within the cultural wars but is still a departure from the curriculum policy debates from earlier periods. In the past, politically defined knowledge was integrated into textbooks but was ultimately optional for districts, schools, and classrooms. The systemic reform movement, however, has attached stakes to curricular standards as they are now tested in high-stakes exams (Sleeter, 2003). In the current era, grade promotion, graduation from high school, and even school closure depend on whether students are able to demonstrate standards on high-stakes exams (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

In Texas, eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies TEKS have high stakes for secondary students because they are aligned with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exit exam, one of four exams that at the time of writing are required for graduation from a Texas high school. Holme and Vasquez Heilig (in press) report that across the United States an increasing majority of students must pass exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma. As of 2008, the twenty-three states with exit testing requirements in place enrolled 68 percent of all public high school students and 75 percent of all students of color in the United States (Center on Education Policy, 2008). In 2012 a total of twenty-six states, enrolling 74 percent of all public high school students and 84 percent of all students of color, required students to pass exit tests to receive a high school diploma (Center on Education Policy, 2008). By 2004 there were four states (Texas, Virginia, Mississippi, and New York) that administered high-stakes social studies exit tests (Grant, 2007).

Sleeter (2003) argues that contemporary accountability-based educational reform efforts undergirded by standards aligned to testing are exceedingly prescriptive and have disparate affects. Sleeter also posits that standards are a new form of hegemony enacted by policy makers that foments an environment of anti-intellectualism by locating the histories of children of color and children from economically poor communities “at the bottom” (p. 20). Supporters of social studies standards argue they encompass a multicultural story, but Sleeter (2002) offers that they instead promote a dominant ideology by discounting the scholarship about historically marginalized groups and attempting to build students’ allegiance to the existing social order. Gillborn (2005)
notes that unremarked racial privileging in educational policy is tacit intentionality and an act of White supremacy that furthers racial advantage and inequity. While these authors have established the power structures and ideology related to standards, they do not delve into textual analyses of them—particularly using race as a lens of analysis to examine standards.

Racial Theory and Standards

Our analysis of the Texas eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies standards drew from CRT in education and critical theories of race and we specifically drew from scholarly work concerned with the subjective dimensions of race and racism at the structural level. By subjective we mean the everyday ways in which race and racism manifest in the lives of individuals (Omi & Winant, 1994). In the case of this study, the subjective constructs of race are the ways in which issues of race and racism are rendered in the Texas standards.

Drawing from the perspectives of legal scholars Guinier and Torres (2002), we recognize racism as the inequitable racial hierarchy that governs resource distribution: “Racism locates the dominant explanation for the depressed socioeconomic, health, and educational condition of people of color in their character and “culture”, rather than the structures of power that create the conditions of their lives” (p. 292). Racism plays out in schools through the context of unequal and oppressive social relationships among different racial groups (Omi & Winant, 1994). For example, CRT scholars (e.g., Lopez, 2003) suggest that racially neutral macro-level educational laws and policies may disguise the salience and impact of racism in schools.

CRT, as an interpretive framework, can challenge the dominant ideology of standards, tests, and accountability, including claims about the objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equality of opportunity purportedly embedded in systems of high-stakes testing (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). CRT can help explain the limited representation of the histories of groups of color in state standards as a structural problem related to the broader issue of racism in educational policy. CRT can also help us question specifically the dominant ideology of NCLB—equality of opportunity and the “achievement gap”—by framing the alignment of standards to tests and accountability ratings as an elegant camouflage of entrenched structural racism.

In the context of this study, we employ CRT to show that the recently revised Texas state standards have been shaped by their macro-level racial context. Policy makers have codified statutes that have redefined the education code in Texas so that students are inundated by hegemonically defined social studies information. Despite community agency challenging the systemic reform movement (McNeil, 2005), these educational policy decisions based on sheer political power have emanated from the state capitol rather than from local districts and schools representing centralized privilege, political power, and ideology. Decades of well-intentioned attempts to create inclusive educational
opportunity via standards that are linked to high-stakes testing and accountability ratings have resulted in a select few political appointees codifying an elegant, yet false, bureaucracy of propaganda that perpetuates massive educational inequity in the curriculum (Iverson, 2007).

While not the direct purview of this study, the effect of these racialized standards can also be understood on a micro level. In this case, the revised social standards can be understood through a micro context of race in two ways. First, the Texas social studies standards present the context whereby race knowledge becomes codified and defined for K–12 students and in so doing helps normalize how race is understood in the classroom. This process is exacerbated in a high-stakes testing environment that relies on and draws specifically from state standards. Second, the manner in which race and racism are rendered through the standards, and in turn shape curriculum, affects the development of cultural memory for both students of color and White students and the ways they make meaning of race and racism in their own daily lives. Indeed, teachers and students explicitly and implicitly confront the questions: Whose knowledge counts? Whose knowledge is worth knowing?

In this analysis, we focus on analyzing the state standards to understand the politically defined representation of race, racism, and communities of color in the midst of NCLB-inspired systemic reform. Our analysis of the Texas eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies standards provides a counternarrative to the equity and excellence narrative purported by the standards, testing, and accountability reformers currently spurring systemic educational policy across the nation.

Methodology
The purpose of this study was to examine if and how the eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies standards addressed issues related to individuals and groups of color and the topics of race and racism. We drew our methodology, approach to methods, and presentation of findings from the work of other education scholars who have conducted similar kinds of social studies curriculum research (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010a; Hess, 2005). We utilized a textual analysis approach (Hall, 1993; Prior, 2003) in which we read, coded, and analyzed how individuals of color, race, and racism were rendered in the text.

We specifically explored the knowledge related to individuals/groups of color and how issues attendant to race and racism play out in the TEKS. To do this we first examined the number of times content standards addressed knowledge attributed to or associated with individuals/groups of color and the number of times that the terms race, racism, or a related, derivative term were specifically invoked. Second, we drew from the theoretical framework of CRT to examine how issues of race and racism were discussed when found in the TEKS. This framework served as a heuristic to read and make mean-
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ing of the racialized knowledge expressed in the TEKS. A hallmark of CRT is the deconstructing of majoritarian historical narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) that serve to distort and mythologize how racial progress has been achieved and pursued in the United States. Of particular importance to this study, CRT challenges the hegemonic narratives of meritocracy and of the centrality of exceptional leaders, rather than collective action, in the push for racial equality. Additionally, CRT scholarship seeks to analyze racial oppression as structural and institutional as well as to understand social change not just as predilections of individuals but as informed by collective action, or what Yamamoto (1997) refers to as “critical race praxis.” Thus, our analysis examined how individuals and structures were contextualized racially throughout the standards, with particular focus on how the standards depicted issues of race and racism (including narratives of racial progress) in the United States.

We analyzed data across three phases and employed a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the first phase, each of us read through the TEKS, highlighting each standard that addressed or was associated with an individual or a group of color and/or that attended to race and/or racism. In the second phase we each read through the identified standards again to specifically code if the standard referenced a specific individual (I) and/or group of color (G) and if and how the standard dealt with race (R) or racism (RS). We identified a standard as dealing with race or racism if it directly used the terms race or racism or if it used a word related to or derived from race or racism. We further coded each identified standard according to whether it addressed racial conflict (RC), racial identity (RI), racism (RS), or race (R), because these ideas directly align with issues of race and racism most likely found in historical narratives (Brown & Brown, 2010b) and in the theories of racism articulated in CRT (Guinier & Torres, 2002). In a similar fashion, and in line with the CRT perspective that race is an institutional factor that plays a permanent and vital role in the history of the United States (Bell, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), we also coded for whether racism was positioned as structural/institutional (S/I) in nature or as individual bias and/or prejudice (IBP) across each of the identified standards. In the third phase we conducted a line-by-line review of the findings generated across each of the first two phases. We used this process to improve inter-rater continuity. We reread and reanalyzed incongruent and/or inconsistent findings across each phase (of which there were very few) until we reached agreement.

Findings
In this section we discuss four key findings that emerged from this study. These include: (1) Relative to Whites, a limited treatment of the involvement and role of specific individuals/groups of color to the U.S. historical narrative—especially Native Americans and Asian Americans; (2) drawing from the discourse of including and such as, a demarcation between the knowledge that
students must learn and the knowledge that they can but do not necessarily have to learn as a part of the formal curriculum to be tested on high-stakes exams; (3) a recognition, yet obscured and distorted, of the existence of race and racism in U.S. history; and (4) a limited use of the actual terms race and racism in the TEKS.

**Identifying Individuals and Groups of Color**

The eleventh-grade history TEKS include 165 total academic standards in several subareas—history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, and culture—that students are expected to master. Of these standards, fifty-five of the eleventh-grade U.S. history TEKS (33%) specifically address issues associated with or related to individuals/groups of color in the United States, with the vast majority specifically focusing on African Americans (13%) and Latina/os (8%). Notably, our descriptive analysis of the standards shows a virtual absence of TEKS devoted to Asian Americans (2%) and Native Americans (4%). Table 1 provides an overview of the individuals/groups of color addressed in the TEKS.

Despite the lack of Asian American and Native American history, a cursory analysis suggests that individuals of color are moderately well represented in the current U.S. history TEKS, being included in about a third of the standards. However, our closer analysis of the TEKS shows that the mere appearance of their history in the TEKS is, to a large extent, an illusion of inclusion.

**The Discourse of Including and Such as**

One of the key features of the social studies TEKS is the way they guide teachers through the main themes, methods for teaching, and knowledge that frames the instruction of the course. The social studies TEKS open with an overview of the main themes of U.S. history and a list of different types of historical resources that teachers should use and address in their classes. Following this introductory discussion, teachers encounter a set of instructions on how to read and use the TEKS in their classroom in order to help students gain an understanding of the main themes pinpointed for the course. This approach is meant to assist administrators and teachers in curricular decision making, presumably at a time when there is more content knowledge to learn than there is instructional time to cover. The TEKS guide cites the Texas Administrative Code (2011) in its introduction to prioritize the standards: "Statements that contain the word ‘including’ reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase ‘such as’ are intended as possible illustrative examples" (§113.41 [b3]). In fact, items termed as **including** must be covered and could be tested on the high-stakes social studies exit exam.

In the eleventh-grade social studies TEKS analyzed in this study, the terms **including** and **such as** are both used. A total of sixty-seven historical figures are named; of these, twenty-four are found in statements that use the term **including**, while forty-three are found in statements that use the term **such as**. We
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Note a troubling pattern in the number of individuals of color that were highlighted for study and in how they fall into these two categories (see Table 2). Overall, fifty-one of the historical figures in the U.S. history TEKS are White. Of the twenty-four historical figures that comprise content knowledge recognized in the TEKS as mandatory for students to learn, only three are African American and two Latina/o. None of the individuals are Native American or Asian. This stands in stark contrast to the nineteen White historical figures that made the “including” list. We identify a similar pattern among the list of historical individuals that fall into the “such as” category. While thirty-two White individuals are on the list, only seven African Americans and four Latinos receive this designation. Neither Native American nor Asian historical figures are represented in the optional group. In analyzing the number of individuals of color recognized in the codified TEKS, we sought to provide a context for our primary textual analysis on how race and racism operate in the standards. Notably, these findings extend prior analyses in the field that found an underrepresentation of various marginalized groups in the proposed social studies TEKS (e.g., see Emilio Zamora’s statement in Bledsoe and Cardenas [2010]).

It is clear from looking at the eleventh-grade TEKS that required content knowledge about White individuals figures prominently in the U.S. historical narrative presented to students, as more than half of African American and Latina/o historical figures are optional while less than half of White historical figures are optional. This finding supports the long-standing critique that official school curricula marginalize and, in the case of Native Americans and Asian Americans, render invisible the role of individuals and groups of color in U.S. history (Noboa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Salvucci, 1992). While this pattern of sidelining the impact of individuals of color is evident from a

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>Number of times cited</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/American Indian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified (e.g., minorities, racial groups)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEKS specifically addressing individuals/groups of color</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEKS not specifically addressing individuals/groups of color</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total TEKS</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A primary concern with using the terms *including* and *such as* is that this framing effectively identifies and partitions social studies knowledge that is recognized as essential and central to the discipline and history of the United States from knowledge that is presumed less pivotal and less important to acquire. An additional concern with the use of these terms in the TEKS is the space they offer teachers to avoid rather than directly tackle issues of difference, race, and racism and their place in U.S. history. The 6A History standard clearly illuminates the problems with using the discourse of *including* and *such as*: “Analyze causes and effects of events and social issues such as immigration, Social Darwinism, eugenics, race relations, nativism, the Red Scare, Prohibition, and the changing role of women” (Texas Administrative Code, 2011, §113.41 [c][6A]). This standard is one of the few that directly uses the term *race*. It requires that students understand the cause-and-effect relationships around key social events and issues associated with race interactions between different racial groups (e.g., race relations), and the racial prejudice and racism that characterized social Darwinist and eugenics discourses and concomitant practice. Yet, while this standard validates the study of race relations by including it as part of the eleventh-grade social studies content standards, it simultaneously marginalizes this knowledge by not marking it as required content for students to be tested on high-stake exams, and by presenting it as one of many options, including several that do not specifically deal with race.

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**TABLE 2  Historical figures cited in the eleventh-grade U.S. history social studies TEKS using including and such as**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals/groups of color</th>
<th>Including</th>
<th>Such as</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>19 (79%)</td>
<td>32 (74%)</td>
<td>51 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
<td>10 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/American Indian</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>43 (100%)</td>
<td>67 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing and Obscuring Race in the TEKS

When examining if race or racism is considered in the TEKS, none of the standards directly uses the term *racism*. Three TEKS deploy terms related to race, including: *race relations* (n = 1), *racial groups* (n = 1), and *racial minorities* (n = 1). The one standard that uses the term *race relations* is located in the history subareas, while the term *racial* is used most often (n = 2) and is only found in the culture subareas.

The topic of race in the eleventh-grade TEKS takes on greater importance when considering how few standards directly or fully address race or racism. This is the case even when a standard deals with a topic or interest related to an individual or a group of color. One of our key findings centers around how the eleventh-grade U.S. history standards approach the topic of race. Akin to the argument made by Pollock (2005) about the complex and contradictory ways school officials and teachers talked and simultaneously did not talk about race, the standards paradoxically recognize race yet obscure the function of race and racial projects in the U.S. historical narrative.

— Group Membership and Racial Ambiguity

Racial ambiguity of knowledge is found in many of the eleventh-grade social studies TEKS. This ambiguity often arises in standards that recognize individuals/groups of color or events and/or issues related to them but provide no clear indication that these people or issues were associated with distinct racial projects or societal activities directly involving and implicating the social category of race (Omi & Winant, 1994). In this way, the standards render race invisible. The 5B History standard illustrates this: “Evaluate the impact of muckrakers and reform leaders such as Upton Sinclair, Susan B. Anthony, Ida B. Wells, and W. E. B. DuBois on American society” (§113.41 [c][5B]). This standard reveals that students are expected to evaluate the impact that a group of reformists had on American society. While these reformists worked during the same early-twentieth-century time period, they came from different backgrounds and were working on widely diverse projects. Ida B. Wells and W. E. B. DuBois, both Black, worked specifically on racial projects that included fighting against White racial violence targeting African Americans and clarifying and seeking to redress the repressive sociological, psychological, political, and educational conditions facing African Americans, including women. However, by solely categorizing Wells and DuBois in the broad category of “muckrakers and reform leaders,” this standard obscures the dominant influence that race played in their work to eradicate racism and racial violence.

The 7G History standard provides another example of how race is simultaneously acknowledged and obscured in addressing the history of patriotism expressed by different groups in the United States.

Explain the home front and how American patriotism inspired exceptional actions by citizens and military personnel, including high levels of military
enlistment; volunteerism; the purchase of war bonds; Victory Gardens; the bravery and contributions of the Tuskegee Airmen, Flying Tigers, and the Navajo Code Talkers; and opportunities and obstacles for women and ethnic minorities. (§113.41 [c][7G])

This standard acknowledges several groups that volunteered for and participated in military campaigns undertaken by the United States. It is not clear from reading this standard, however, that some of these groups were racial minorities (e.g., African American, Chinese Americans) who, at the time of their military service, willingly fought for a nation-state that denied them basic citizenship and social, political, economic, and educational opportunities.

The practice of acknowledging yet disavowing race in the TEKS illustrates the complex yet myopic way that race and racism are addressed in K–12 standards. This approach, while appearing to acknowledge race, simultaneously renders it invisible and thus positions it as irrelevant as a factor of real historical significance. Failing to acknowledge race as a key element in social analysis aligns with a color-blind ideological framework (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) that characterizes the approach taken to race in the post–Civil Rights era. What a color-blind ideology effectively accomplishes is presenting U.S. history as race-neutral.

— Privileging the Myth of Racial Progress
Alongside the color-blind way knowledge is spelled out, the TEKS also present distorted knowledge about racial progress in the United States. This occurs through an approach typically used in the TEKS to address knowledge about individuals/groups of color: providing a list of exceptional, heroic individuals students must (i.e., including) or can (i.e., such as) learn about in the curriculum. The 9C History standard offers an example of this strategy, illustrating one way of distorting a narrative of racial progress: “Identify the roles of significant leaders who supported various rights movements, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Hector P. Garcia and Betty Friedan” (§113.41 [c][9C]). In this example we find a list of exceptional leaders, including four people of color who played important roles across various civil rights movements. Scholars critique the tendency of social studies curriculum to focus primarily on “leaders” in social movements (Aldridge, 2006) while disavowing the culminating effects of agitation that take place over time and that involve the daily, collective, strategic grassroots efforts of many individuals. In the context of race, and using a CRT framework, this approach mythologizes and distorts racial progress (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) by diminishing the significance of critical racial praxis (Yamamoto, 1997) or collective activity that relies on strategic mobilization and the everyday actions of individuals in local communities and contexts.

We did note a few instances where the eleventh-grade social studies TEKS recognized the role played by individuals collectively in the historical trajectory of the civil rights movement, including work that led to the passage of key
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Constitutional amendments since the nineteenth century. Yet, what stands out about these standards is that while doing so, they too often fail to clearly invoke knowledge about race and/or racism and do not explicitly require that students understand the role local individuals collectively played in these organizational and legislative efforts. One example is the 9B History standard: “Describe the roles of political organizations that promoted civil rights, including ones from African American, Chicano, American Indian, women’s and other civil rights movements” (§113.41 [c][9B]). As in other cases in the TEKS, no specific reference is made to race or racism in this standard. Additionally, while it requires that students gain important knowledge about the agentic role played by significant leaders in various civil rights movements, the role of political organizations that promoted civil rights, and the relationship between the development of civil rights movements and the passage of key constitutional amendments, there is no specific focus placed on the collective historical and modern-day actions of individuals working in the local, daily context.

In light of the troubling tendency in the eleventh-grade social studies standards to render issues of race and racism invisible, in conjunction with the distorted knowledge provided about racial progress in the United States, we wonder how teachers and students make sense of standards that highlight the exceptional accomplishments made by individuals of color. We found that a large portion of eleventh-grade social studies TEKS that deal with individuals/groups of color often do so by specifying individuals to include in the curriculum. The following standards exemplify both the strategy of listing individuals of color as relevant curricula knowledge for students while concurrently reinscribing a majoritarian racial narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) of meritocracy that suggests any and all, regardless of the larger social context in which they exist, can soar to extraordinary social and economic heights:

Culture 26D: Identify the political, social, and economic contributions of women such as Frances Willard, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, Dolores Huerta, Sonia Sotomayor, and Oprah Winfrey to American society. (§113.41 [c][26D])

Economics 18A: Discuss the role of American Entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates, Sam Watson, Estée Lauder, Robert Johnson, Lionel Sosa, and millions of small business entrepreneurs who achieved the American Dream. (§113.41 [c][18A])

We also noted an interesting example that at first glance appeared to counter the meritocracy narrative implied in the standards cited above. In the Economics 17D standard, students are expected to learn about federal interventions that sought to provide economic opportunities for citizens, including affirmative action: “Identify actions of government and the private sector such as the Great Society, affirmative action, and Title IX to create economic opportunities for citizens and analyze the unintended consequences of each” (§113.41 [c][17D]). A critical look at this statement reveals several troubling perspectives that require unpacking. The first is the categorization and language invoked to discuss these federal interventions. While it is clear that
the programs outlined do seek to improve the economic conditions faced by groups that historically faced discrimination because of their socioeconomic, racial, and/or gender group membership, these programs are not framed in relation to the larger social conditions that made their creation necessary in the first place: discrimination. In the case of individuals/groups of color, one might ask: Why is affirmative action—a set of federal policies designed to assist and compensate for the long-standing disadvantages faced by historically marginalized groups (often those of color)—introduced only in the context of economics? And further, why is affirmative action not discussed in relation to the racial discrimination these individuals/groups have experienced before and since the founding of the United States?

These questions highlight once again the lack of acknowledgment given to issues of race and racism in the TEKS. Yet, compounding the invisibility of race is the expectation that students will learn about the actions taken by the federal government to create remedy programs such as affirmative action, as well as the “unintended consequences” of the program. Left out of this statement is clarity about what actually constitutes “unintended consequences” and the expectation that students will also understand the useful and/or productive effects of this and similar federal interventions. Encountering this standard, one finds a vague, strangely constructed standard that implicates yet disavows racism at one and the same moment.

*The Evasive Use of Racism in the TEKS*

The curious mixture of acknowledging and obscuring race is also evident in the way that racism is addressed and found in the TEKS. While the term *racism* is not directly used in the standards, the issue of racism is implicitly addressed in the context of targeted groups of color. In some instances this is accomplished by directly identifying specific individuals and groups that played an instrumental role—as agents of the state—in systematically denying individuals and groups of color their civil rights: “9G History: Describe the role of individuals such as governors George Wallace, Orval Faubus, and Lester Maddox and groups, including the Congressional bloc of southern Democrats, that sought to maintain the status quo” (§113.41 [c][9G]). Drawing from coded and softened language that does not directly use, but alludes to, *racism*—“maintain the status quo”—this standard addresses racism but does so without directly using the term and without acknowledging the White identity of those implicated in these actions. This approach helps shape a specific category of person that engaged in racist behavior, such as southern congressmen and southern governors. While rendering Whiteness fundamentally invisible, it also relegates racism to individual predilection, prejudice, and behavior rather than to institutional structures and state-sanctioned officials who actively engaged in, ignored, or failed to adequately intervene on, but ultimately benefited from, racist, often violent White-initiated behavior (Brown & Brown, in press).
This example stands in contrast, however, to the 9D History standard that deals specifically with African Americans and their quest for civil rights: “Compare and contrast the approach taken by some civil rights groups such as the Black Panthers with the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King Jr.” (§113.41 [c][9D]). Here students are expected to compare and contrast the different approaches taken by African American leadership to achieve civil rights. While not specifically identifying African Americans by name or category, the standard implies this group by offering two possible examples to compare and contrast what came out of the African American experience: the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Panthers. The Black Panther Party, a radical Black nationalist political movement that emerged in the mid-1960s, advocated for necessity of armed defense/resistance against ongoing, recalcitrant White, state-sanctioned violence specifically targeted against African Americans (Davenport, 2009). It is not expected that students will understand the contextual nature of the Black Panther Party and its philosophy and goals, nor its historic relationship to the mainstream civil rights movement led by Dr. King. Thus, it is curious that this particular standard implicates and focuses directly on violence—in this case defensive violence perpetrated by African Americans in the name of gaining civil rights—while the 9G History standard fails to mention or acknowledge the role that racial violence played in curtailing the political, social, and economic rights of African Americans in the United States. Together, these two standards highlight again how race is obscured in strategically nuanced ways.

— The Primacy of Federal Legal Action
Another way that racism is implicitly addressed in the TEKS is found in statements that address federal legal actions that denied groups of color their civil rights in the United States.

7D History: Analyze major issues of World War II, including the Holocaust; the internment of German, Italian, and Japanese Americans and Executive Order 9066; and the development of conventional atomic weapons. (§113.41 [c][7D])

15C Economics: Explain how foreign policies affected economic issues such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Open Door Policy, Dollar Diplomacy, and immigration quotas. (§113.41, [c][15C])

These examples, though also failing to use the actual term racism, do address historical events that admittedly either violated the constitutional rights of citizens of color in the United States or denied individuals access to opportunities in the country on the basis of racial discrimination. Students exposed to this knowledge will (or may, in the case of the 15C Economics standard that uses the phrase such as) learn that the federal government played a role in redressing institutionalized discrimination of targeted groups of color through the passage of legislative acts.
While some TEKS clearly specify the racial actors targeted by institutionalized racism, in TEKS focused on African Americans and Latinos there is often no immediate acknowledgment of the racialized actors involved with and implicated by institutionalized racism and the legislative efforts taken to formally redress these experiences. The 9A History standard illustrates this: “Trace the historical development of the civil rights movement in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, including the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th amendments” (§113.41 [c][9A]). Here the standard acknowledges the historical relationship between the civil rights movement and the passage of several constitutional amendments. Yet nothing in the standard itself pinpoints racism as a specific theme to cover in this topic of study. Familiarity with the amendments, however, along with the specific verbiage in the statement, provides an indication that the passage of these amendments was in part due to the efforts of U.S. civil rights movements across three centuries.

Situating potential social studies content knowledge about racism within the context of federal legislative or judicial action is the primary way that racism is invoked in the eleventh-grade social studies TEKS. For example, TEKS identify legislative or judicial actions taken in response to the practice of institutionalized racial discrimination as required knowledge that all students need to access.

21A Government: Analyze the effects of landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions, including Brown v. Board of Education, and other U.S. Supreme Court decisions such as Plessy v. Ferguson, Hernandez v. Texas, Tinker v. Des Moines, Wisconsin v. Yoder, and White v. Regester. (§113.41 [c][21A])

9F History: Describe presidential actions and congressional votes to address minority rights in the United States, including desegregation of the armed forces, the Civil Rights acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (§113.41 [c][9F])

Yet, regardless of whether a given standard provides specific and immediate acknowledgment that it is associated with the racial discrimination of an individual/group of color, what is always obscured across the standards, including those that concern legal or judicial actions designed to redress institutionalized discriminatory practices, is the fact that each of these actions occurred in a context of racism found in the dominant White society. Taking this approach accomplishes two tasks. It valorizes the U.S. government and its officials (e.g., presidents, Supreme Court justices, legislators) as agents of social change that dismantled societal institutions that denied groups of color their civil rights and social, political, economic, and educational opportunities in the United States, while simultaneously disavowing the government’s role in creating and maintaining this inequitable system in the first place. Social change is relegated to the individual acts of government officials rather than to continuous agitation among multiple actors at the federal, state, and grassroots levels.
And, in an ironic twist, all of this is accomplished without the direct acknowledgment of race, racism, and White privilege.

Conclusion

Our textual analysis illustrates the limited knowledge about race, racism, and communities of color found in the revised social studies history standards in Texas. We noted how specific narratives of U.S. national history were embodied in and reflected by the standards that addressed individuals/groups of color, race, and racism. We paid particular attention to how these standards positioned the contributions of individuals and groups of color and the role of race and racism as nonexistent, peripheral, or tangential to U.S. national history. The Texas social studies standards case also demonstrates how curricular knowledge is subtly recrafted by distorting the inclusion of race, racism, and groups of color in U.S. history.

Many systemic reformers in the standards, testing, and accountability movements have acted as though government could create standards without making allowances for the historic divisions in American opinions about education and our appetite for “mortal combat” on these issues (Cohen, 1996, p. 124). Early on, Apple (1992) argued that there was little discussion of standards’ ideological and social grounding and effects. He predicted that standards would be used in ways that “would largely lend support only to the conservative agenda for school reform” (p. 412). Cohen and Apple are confirmed prognosticators two decades later as the Texas case exemplifies how recent standards policy in Texas and elsewhere have subtly obscured race and racism in the canon of required knowledge. However, as critical educational scholars note, where there is power, there also is resistance. In the context of Texas, this has meant the pursuit of an ongoing and persistent challenge to the state’s definition of what constitutes legitimate historical knowledge about communities of color. Numerous activists have coalesced around this issue of curriculum and standards, helping to thwart some of the most egregious revisions of these standards. In addition to analyzing the standards across various stages of the process (Noboa, 2012), their community agency also helped make the discussion of standards a public national debate.

The Texas case may just be the tip of the iceberg, as the concentration of curricular power in the hands of a few political appointees and their “experts” has gained momentum in other states. For example, Arizona’s House Bill 2281 has banned ethnic studies in K–12 education. The legislation is rooted in the belief that histories of minority groups are adequately represented in the state standards for students because they are “all individuals and not of the race they were born into” (Gordon & Reinhart, 2011). On its face, the Texas and Arizona cases appear different, but, in fact, they are both subtractive in nature. Valenzuela (1999) identified subtractive schooling as the detrimental effects of
policies and practices that minimize culture and language. In these state-level cases of standards gone awry, policy makers have usurped knowledge about race and racism and forced their narrow paradigm on districts, schools, and classrooms. For example, Arizona has disallowed local school districts such as Tucson Unified, a district that serves large numbers of poor and minority students, to teach a broader, richer, and representative culturally relevant curriculum. Arizona is yet another recent case where hegemonic political power has been wielded in a state capital to define educational standards according to particular viewpoints that may or may not resonate with local districts, schools, and their communities.

This study also highlights the need for future research at the classroom level to understand how racism embedded in standards shapes school curriculum and teaching and affects the day-to-day lives of Asian American, Black, Native American, Latino, and White students taking social studies and history courses in Texas and elsewhere. If standards and the exit tests aligned to them are the primary curricular focus of teachers, we suspect that secondary students will have diminished opportunities to acquire both a critical cultural memory of race in the United States and an understanding of how this history continues to manifest in the present.

Clearly the social studies TEKS case shows that standards can fail to provide the historical knowledge and conceptual tools needed to make sense of the elusive, complex, and institutionalized nature of race inequality. This is of particular concern because, as scholars note, White, middle-class teachers—who make up the majority of practicing and preparing teachers in the United States (Sleeter, 2008)—often resist addressing the topic of race and racism, a phenomenon related to their privileged and racially isolated social location (Brown & Brown, 2010a; Epstein, 2009). Additionally, while teachers, regardless of social location, may have varying degrees of personal/experiential knowledge about the role of race in U.S. history and society—particularly if they are of color—students of color and their White counterparts in the classroom may still encounter purposely fragmented historical knowledge about the powerful role of race by way of standards-based curriculum and testing.

This type of CRT analysis provides an analytical lens that goes beyond the discourse of equity and social justice that typically accompanies the conversation about standards. This analysis extends from and moves beyond a politics of recognition (Brown & Brown, 2010b; Fraser, 2000; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995) or the focus on highlighting imbalanced representation of marginalized groups in official school knowledge. In our study, using a CRT lens to analyze how the codified standards addressed race and racism illuminates that, while important, concern with inclusion or exclusion is not enough (Brown & Brown, 2010b). Thus, we believe that the careful CRT analysis we have used here can serve as a heuristic to analyze how race operates in textbooks (Brown & Brown, 2010a, 2010b) as well as in evolving national and state standards and high-stakes exams.
The 2010 revision of the social studies TEKS in Texas also provides an excellent case study in the perils of conflating “standards” and “standardization.” Linda McNeil (personal communication, March 16, 2011) observed that standardization under the Texas accountability system reduces history to names, dates, disembodied facts—with little regard to how they came to be a part of the chronicled record, much less how they came to be institutionalized into curricular knowledge. The Texas State Board of Education set out to institutionalize a body of information that children would be tested on through multiple-choice computer-scored tests; their approach was to consider information as infallible and the TEKS as necessarily carrying the imprimatur of the state. The epistemologies at the heart of historical research, of debates among historians, and of the writing of history—that is, the essence of the field itself—would be excluded from the required curriculum. Without the epistemological debates and without making visible how historical records are constructed and deconstructed, the social studies curriculum then could be easily prescribed to be whatever a particular group claimed it to be. The intellectual work of history and of historians and social scientists could drop out of the social studies curriculum. Also omitted are the histories constructed and sustained by communities, the “people’s histories” emerging in localities from collective experiences and from particularized interpretations within the larger national narrative and conveyed to the next generation. These silences (e.g., Asian American and Native American history), enabled by standardization, leave open to fiat whose history gets included and how.

In this article we demonstrate that standards need to be analyzed meticulously using the lens of race. Despite the equity discourse enveloping NCLB, our textual analysis of the TEKS is a cautionary tale for systemic reformers, as it highlights how race, culture, and difference can be centralized and obscured in very nuanced ways—an illusion of inclusion. We argue that the analysis of standards and curriculum must be contextualized by the ideological and racial politics embedded within the equity discourse of standards and aligned testing. The original intent of many systemic reformers was to create standards and align high-stakes tests to foment equity and excellence in schools. However, considering the Texas case, whether subsequent policy makers across the United States will be able to resist co-opting state and national standards to instead detach knowledge from epistemological debates and standardize knowledge for their own political purposes remains to be seen.

Notes
2. The information in Table 2 provides another level of detail to Table 1. Table 1 shows the total number of TEKS focusing on groups of color, while Table 2 shows data that focus on individuals included in the TEKS—which could include several counts per standard (e.g., Culture 26D, which includes seven individuals).
References


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