

Controversial Issues in United States History Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand how secondary level United States History teachers approached controversial issues in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. Controversial issues consisted of multiple points of view, were socially constructed, and had the potential to challenge belief systems. The audience and their perception of a topic determined the degree of controversy. The questions explored were what factors did secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating controversy in their classrooms and how did they introduce what they considered controversial issues into their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms? To answer these questions, twelve secondary level teachers who taught 6th, 7th, or 11th grade United States History participated in this study. Information was garnered through interviews of individuals and focus groups. Some participants provided resources used in their lessons and scenarios of their teaching experiences. My principle findings were:

- Place played a role in teachers' willingness to incorporate controversial issues into their classrooms. This was due to students' preconceived notions developed by their geographical location and family.
- The experiences of teachers and students influenced discussion of controversial issues. This included how long the teacher had taught the content or past experiences with parents and administrators. Students' experiences were derived from their family and community, which influenced incorporation of controversial issues.

- Teachers were influenced by the standards they were required to teach. Though some saw these as a restriction in teaching, others used them as a springboard to what they perceived as deeper, meaningful teaching.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. All of you have contributed in your own special way to help me to succeed and I could have not done this without your support. Thank you to . . .

my dad for instilling into me a strong determination and work ethic. He often expressed his pride in me for being the first in our extended family to pursue a Ph.D. Though he did not live until my degree completion, I know he would have a big smile on his face because of this accomplishment.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Tragic events in American history cause disengaged citizens to unify with fellow citizens to reach out to those in need. With passage of time, this unification wanes until the next horrific act. This was true with 9/11 as well as in smaller communities where tragedies occurred, such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Aurora. Like the previous tragedies, the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre fueled renewed dialogue of how to prevent shooting tragedies and necessary measures to protect our citizens. Gun control and mental illness policies have been scrutinized, which continues to cause heated debates among citizens. Hess (2009) states multiple points of view are part of living in a democracy and educators need to incorporate controversial topics into classrooms so students understand varying perspectives, learn the art of compromise, and acquire skills to make educated decisions to live in a democracy.

Prior to the attack on Sandy Hook Elementary School, the controversial issue dominating the news and conversations of many Americans was the impending 2012 fiscal cliff. After the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, the locus of popular controversy shifted to gun control and mental illness. This gives evidence that controversial issues are not static, but constantly evolve and have the potential to increase to new levels of controversy. For example, teaching about the Second Amendment is part of the Commonwealth of Virginia's standards, but teachers' comfort levels vary in discussing the right to bear arms. The depth of discussion can be dependent on the school's community or how occurrences often ignite emotions, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. As a result of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, President Obama appointed Vice-President Biden to lead a task force on gun violence. After meeting with Vice-President Biden, the National Rifle Association voiced disappointment

of the task force's perceived lack of emphasis on "keeping our children safe and how much it had to do with an agenda to attack the Second Amendment" (Madhani, 2013). However, the *Washington Post* reported 52% of those polled were more supportive of gun control as a result of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy (Nakamura & Cohen, 2013).

Considering the fluidity of controversial issues and multiple points of view, as well as the role of teachers in developing students into civic-minded individuals, the purpose of my study is to understand the factors that shape how United States History teachers approach controversial issues in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. Specifically, I want to understand what factors shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. I also want to examine what factors secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating the controversy linked to an issue. The amount of controversy attached to an issue is based on the audience (Washington & Humphries, 2011), and state-mandated standards dictate the curriculum (David, 2011); however, Thornton (2005) states teachers have the role of gatekeepers and

make the educational decisions in the place where they ultimately count: the classroom. That is, they make the day-to-day decisions concerning both the subject matter and the experiences to which pupils have access and the nature of that subject matter and those experiences. (p. 1)

Thornton (2005) asserts teachers play integral roles as decision makers within the context of their classrooms. In an effort to understand the complexity of classroom cultures and issues when incorporating controversial topics, teachers' perceptions and actions need to be understood. As a justification for this study, there are controversial issues discussed in literature and how they

can be problematic or can be used to enhance learning; however, there is a gap identifying specific issues teachers personally consider controversial in the standards they are required to teach. There can be an assumption United States History teachers will identify common issues as being controversial within the standards the Commonwealth of Virginia they are required to teach.

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires a Standards of Learning (SOL) test at the end of the academic year for the United States History course. Educators may consider some topics in the standards controversial, which can result in teachers minimally teaching the topic. Teachers can also perceive a sense of pressure from administrators for their students to perform well on these state-mandated tests. In addition to the standards-based, high-stakes test, both the Commonwealth of Virginia and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) promote civic competence so students will acquire the skills to become active participants in a democracy (NCSS, 2010; Virginia Department of Education, 2008).

In order to understand the role of controversial issues within the context of classrooms in the Commonwealth of Virginia, my research question is: What factors shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues in their teaching of United States History in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms? The supporting research question that illuminates the overarching question is: What factors do secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating the controversy attached to an issue discussed in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

Conceptual Frameworks

Whether intentional or not, controversial issues have the potential to enter into discussion in United States History classrooms. The response to these issues can be influenced by prior

experiences of the teacher and students. Preconceived notions have the power to ignite or extinguish the benefits of discussing controversial issues. Since prior knowledge interprets and constructs reality (Jonassen, 1991), and teachers serve in the role of gatekeepers (Thornton, 2005), I used interpretative and constructivism paradigms for this qualitative research as well as the framework of phenomenology. The phenomenological framework was appropriate for this research since it seeks to understand teachers' roles as gatekeepers.

The Phenomenological Framework

An interpretative and constructivist approach was used in my research since it served as the basis for many ideas of phenomenology (Gregor, 2013). The interpretative paradigm is associated with qualitative research (Goldkul, 2011), and "interpretivists argue that if we want to understand social action, we have to delve into the reasons and meanings which that action has for people" (Abbott, 2010).

In the role of gatekeepers, teachers observe, reason, and explain phenomenon they encounter. Teachers' prior knowledge and preconceived notions in combination with topics they are required to teach can coalesce to influence how students are exposed to issues. This has the potential to determine how controversial issues are approached in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. Phenomenological research provided an avenue to understand how individuals perceived various occurrences by examining their interaction with particular events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Delimitations

This study focused on the ways twelve United States History teachers in the Commonwealth of Virginia perceived controversial issues within their standards. Students, parents, or school administrators were not participants in this study. The purpose of this research

was to examine ways teachers alleged they incorporated controversial issues into their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms as well as the issues they deemed controversial. The twelve teachers were chosen from two school districts as a convenience for the researcher. There was a face-to-face interview with each participant, follow-up interviews, and two focus groups to allow participants to exchange thoughts with one another as well as the researcher.

Limitations

Although there was a balance of genders, all of the participants in this research were White. I personally know and had worked in the same building with four of the participants. I had previously interacted with three of the participants in a professional setting. Prior to the interviews, I had not met five of the participants. The participants taught in mostly rural schools in mid-Western Virginia and Central Virginia, which limited my research since teachers in schools in metropolitan areas were not part of my assemblage of interviewees. A final limitation was classroom observations were not part of this research. Since findings were based solely on interviews, I had to rely on what the participants perceived they did in the classroom, but understand it could be contrary to what actually transpired during classroom instruction.

Organization of the Study

The result of the research is a study organized into five chapters. Chapter One establishes the basis and importance for this study. The problem statement and research questions are included as well as a synopsis of the frameworks and definition of key terms. Chapter Two contains a review of literature related to the topics of defining the most controversial issues and teaching those topics. Chapter Three explains the framework and methodology used for this qualitative research. This includes the selection process, collection of data, and data analysis. Chapter Four details the findings of the research and samples provided to the researcher by some of the

participants. Chapter Five presents a summary of the project, discussion of findings and educational implications, significance of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Defining a Controversial Issue

Issues are not necessarily controversial by nature, but are socially constructed and a topic is more likely to be considered controversial if it is an ongoing issue that is not settled and still open for debate (Hess, 2009; Washington & Humphries, 2011). Hess (2009) also stated controversial issues consist of multiple answers and opinions and can “spark significant disagreement” (p. 37). Such topics are considered important and involve “value judgments, so that the issue cannot be settled by facts, evidence or experiment alone” (Claire & Holden, 2007, p. 5). Hess (2009) affirms that if an issue is controversial in society, it is also controversial in schools’ curriculum. Both closed and open issues can be found in state-mandated curriculum. Closed issues are topics that have one perspective and are non-controversial, whereas an open issue has multiple perspectives and is controversial (Camica, 2008, p. 301).

Teaching controversial issues may cause division within a society and have the potential to make both students and teachers feel uncomfortable, particularly considering one’s geographic location (Washington & Humphries, 2011). The issues can disturb “the peace and stability of the scholastic environment” . . . yet in a democratic society, controversy is what defines the social studies” (Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, and Turner, 2011, p. 32), which is indicative that most topics in history and social science courses have the potential to be steeped in controversy.

Even if issues are not thought to be controversial, Washington and Humphries (2011) in their study examining discussion of race in a predominantly white, rural area claim it is possible for issues to become surrounded by controversy based on the audience because individuals possess varying points of view on topics that can be influenced by their location (place).

Washington and Humphries (2011) found many students in their study exhibited racist views either through classroom discussion or privately to their teacher. Just as Hess (2009) proposes, Washington and Humphries (2011) state society plays a role in determining how controversial an issue will be and they do not remain static. The time an issue occurs in history determines its controversy, with the most current issues being more controversial (Oxfam, 2006). Discussion of controversial issues can be healthy for a democracy since the colloquy between varying viewpoints empowers citizens to develop “political tolerance, [teach] people, and may result in better policy decisions” (Hess, 2009, p. 16).

Place, Experience, and Standards

History and social science as a body of knowledge includes controversial issues, although this does not mean these issues will automatically enter into all classrooms. From the wealth of literature, three salient themes emerge. First, influences of place, especially the geographic location and the political context of regions, contribute towards classroom discussions of controversial issues (den Heyer, 2005; Hess, 2009; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Tilley, 2012; Washington & Humphries, 2011). Second, the classroom can be stressful for teachers and students when controversial issues are broached. This can be influenced by the teacher’s experiences as well as previous experiences of the students. Teachers have a fear of repercussions from parents, administrators, students, and other teachers. Experiences and knowledge play a role in teachers’ willingness and methods used to discuss controversial issues with their students (Baker, 2004; Bielby, 1999; Burkstrand-Reid, Carbone, & Hendricks, 2011; Hess, 2004, 2009; Hendrix, 1981). Finally, the standards cause teachers to feel the pressures of covering the required material within the allotted time. (Berube, 2004; Diamond, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004; Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, & Turner, 2011; van

Hover, Hicks, & Irwin, 2007). Novice teachers are faced with many challenges, but in a study by van Hover, Hicks, and Irwin (2007) on historical thinking, high-stakes testing, and beginning teachers, they found all teachers feel the pressure of time management. The seven beginning teachers in their research “perceived the time pressures imposed by the SOL tests as extreme” (van Hover, Hicks, & Irwin, 2007, p. 97). Some teachers may exhibit discomfort with the content of what they are assigned to teach in addition to the need to prepare students for high-stakes testing. If teachers do not possess content knowledge, they are prone to rely on the standards for classroom instruction. If teachers possess the content knowledge, time or fear of repercussions may be a deterrent to discussion of controversial issues.

Place can influence controversial issues by the geographic location of where they are taking place as well as the emphasis the media places on them. This can arouse public opinion and issues have the potential to become steeped in controversy. The ways the media report current events have a major impact on how controversial issues infiltrates into the general population and classrooms. Additionally, the public can become fixated on a topic based on the duration of the media’s focus on particular issues. Len Stevens, WSET news anchor in Lynchburg, Virginia, and freelance journalist, Alix Hines, emphasized the media’s role as a powerful tool of dissemination because they serve as avenues for information through newspapers, magazines, television, or the Internet.

Teachers face decisions of how sensitive topics will be discussed in their classrooms, if they are. This can be influenced by a teacher’s experience and interactions with students, parents, or administrators. Philpott et al. (2011) in their study examining six teachers and how they dealt with controversial issues in history and social science classrooms provide an illustrative example of this in their description of one teacher’s nervousness about teaching a World War II unit at the

end of the school year, which was not a designated part of the curriculum. The researchers also noted this educator exhibited a perceived lack of academic freedom to teach the Holocaust because he would not broach the subject “without first talking to his principal” (Philpott et al., 2011, p. 36). In their research of the practices for incorporating controversial issues into classrooms, Philpott et al. (2011) attributed a hesitation of a discussion about the Holocaust was due to the risk of deviating into other contentious issues. When teaching about the Holocaust, there was the possibility that discussion could shift to more current human rights violations such as the conflict in Syria, which had the potential to cause a level of discomfort for the teacher, students, and beyond the classroom. The study by Philpott et al., found within the classroom, the curriculum dominated one teacher’s inability to teach controversial issues, a second teacher exhibited a lack of academic freedom, and the final teacher felt the risk of losing classroom control was too great if there was discussion of controversial topics.

Standards cause teachers to be hesitant to incorporate controversial issues into their lessons because of the constraints placed on them to cover the required material in the allotted time they are given (Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). There is the perception by many educators that high-stakes tests restrict their ability to teach creatively and they must teach to the test (Berube, 2004). As a teacher, Berube (2004) referred to the Virginia Standards of Learning as a “wonderful roadmap” (p. 264) and notes other teachers use them as a foundation for the required content to be taught and do not allow the standards to restrict their teaching. In his study of the ways high-stakes testing influences classroom instruction, Diamond (2007) interviewed and observed teachers and found testing and standards directly influenced 50% of these educators’ teaching practices. The standards “led the teachers to focus on specific issues

within subjects . . . and cover the material more quickly to complete it before students were tested” (Diamond, 2007, p. 294).

Because of his own teaching experiences, British educator, Philip Bielby (1999), recommends practical strategies “for realising [*sic*] pedagogical objectives in teaching morally contentious issues, using insights gained from teaching morally contentious issues . . . to address how pedagogical principles can be applied that are conducive to critical reflection” (p. 369-370). When teaching such issues, Bielby (1999) proposes that critical thought should be part of the learning process as well as respect for varying beliefs.

The especially sensitive topics of gender roles or same-sex marriages may be avoided in classroom discussions because they will be considered too controversial, perhaps due to religious or cultural beliefs (place), a perceived lack of students’ maturity (experience), or because they are not part of the district’s curriculum (standards). Additionally, the fact sex will possibly be discussed in conjunction with these topics may be too taboo as well (van Driel & Kahn, 2012). The National Association for Multicultural Education (2003) stresses the importance of a culturally knowledgeable educational staff and a school’s curriculum that should “directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia.” The literature reveals many topics have the potential to be controversial, but the ones mentioned most often were race relations, the Vietnam War, the Holocaust, and 9/11 (Cowan & Matiles, 2012; Hess & Stoddard, 2007, 2011; Howard, 2004; Philpott et al., 2011; Washington & Humphries, 2011). The media’s coverage of these topics somewhat diminish over time, but these topics can still be considered controversial issues in classrooms. The aforementioned topics and the media have the potential to allow students to become engaged in “issues of constitutionality or ethics or morality that evolve during a time of

crisis” (Hess & Stoddard, 2011, p. 179). However, the literature indicates this is not being done. In fact, these topics were not being discussed in detail, if they were discussed at all. With the time constraints placed on teachers and the fact these topics would likely be discussed chronologically and fall at the end of the year just prior to high-stakes testing, teachers chose (or may have no other choice) than to allow these topics to slide to the wayside.

Place. In his phenomenological research of places, paths, and monuments, British archaeologist and anthropologist Tilley (2012) states “places constitute space as centres [*sic*] of human meaning, their singularity being manifested and expressed in the day-to-day experiences and consciousness of people within particular lifeworlds.” (p. 14-15). With the rise of technology, the media allow individuals to remain up-to-date with events occurring in the world and often how these issues are perceived can be dependent on individuals’ geographic location.

Role of the media. The media are strong contributors of how and what issues are controversial. Teachers and students can bring those issues into the classroom, whether through current events or other influences. Students come into classrooms with preconceived notions that have been instilled into them by family, friends, and their communities. The way the media report current events have a major impact on how issues are perceived by the population and their degree of controversy. The media are a powerful tool of dissemination because they serve as avenues for information through newspapers, magazines, television, or the Internet.

Stevens, WSET news anchor in Lynchburg, Virginia, states that though not always, the media can influence public opinion, and he uses the Trayvon Martin case (Case No. 592012CF001083A) as an example. Martin was a 17-year-old unarmed, African American man who was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a multi-racial Hispanic man. Stevens believes when interest in the Martin story was waning, there were personal attacks on Martin’s character

by reporting his marijuana use, which was the media's attempt to extend interest in the story.

Stevens added:

The writers who tease stories are good, very good. Often, anger is the best motivator for continued viewing . . . it's what helped the medium grow exponentially since the 80s . . . against that backdrop, stories like the Martin shooting, while fascinating and bringing awareness to issues of race in this country, often serve only to deepen prejudices and lead to more anger and violence. (personal communication, May 9, 2012)

Stevens states the media (especially television) play a large role in providing what Americans will discuss and their

role has only grown, with the advent of 24-hour news—and the decidedly opinion-driven prime time lineups at, say, Fox news and MSNBC . . . and the stories they promote—sometimes sensationalize—are the kind of stories that often push people's buttons . . . without the fire of opinion shows, it tends to be much more boring.” (personal communication, May 9, 2012)

Freelance journalist, Alix Hines, states the “Media decides [*sic*] what is newsworthy because it has to be an issue people are interested in” (personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Geographical location and preconceived notions. As Stevens indicated, the media's focus to attract audiences and draw them into their stories is often influenced by geographic location or preconceived notions that were formed by political or cultural beliefs. Therefore, teachers need to provide a place for students to “debate controversial issues in a free and uncensored forum [which] is generally accepted to be at the heart of a democracy” (Claire, 2007, p. 7) beyond their geographical and political context.

For teachers who struggle with incorporating controversial issues into their lessons, it was recommended by Burkstrand-Reid, Carbone, and Hendricks, (2011) during a panel discussion of strategies for teaching controversial issues, that in order to avoid dampening discussions “down to a whisper” (p. 680), teachers can, indeed, effectively use controversial issues to enhance their students’ learning, but they need to use “a toolbox of techniques and [have] a willingness to engage in honest self-reflection and pedagogical re-examination” (p. 684). A recommended method of introducing controversial issues into classrooms is through current events, which can connect recent occurrences to our history—some of which can be deemed controversial. Does this mean that all current events are controversial? According to Hess (2009), the terms controversial issues and current events can be the same and are used interchangeably although they should not be. A topic can be a current event, but not necessarily controversial.

Past NCSS president, Michael Hartoonian, states, “our work should illuminate the essential connection among social studies learning, democratic values, and positive citizenship” (NCSS, 2012a, p. 7). In a study of how the hot button issue of immigration is discussed in Arizona high schools, Graseck (2009) asserts that high school teachers are particularly charged with the duty to incorporate controversial issues into classrooms. Teachers expose students to issues that they will encounter in the 21st century, and allow them to grapple with these issues in the classroom since high school is “the last universal stop on the path to adulthood and full citizenship” (Graseck, 2009, p. 46).

Barton & McCully (2007), in their research examining practical methods to teach controversial issues, assert controversy is present inside and outside of the classroom today, which can be beneficial to students and will build skills to prepare them to live in a democratic

society. In an empirical research involving schools throughout the nation, Hess (2009) studied the incorporation of controversial issues into history and social science classrooms and found schools have the potential to provide an education for students that will prepare them to live in a democratic society and to do this, controversial issues need to be incorporated into classrooms. The NCSS (2012b) promotes the use of controversial issues in classrooms and proposes allowing students to recognize an aspect of society that includes multiple points of view in discussions. Use of these issues will develop students' skills of critical analysis, which will help them better understand social issues in the past as well as today. Students will learn to listen to the views of others, learn the art of compromise, be able to make informed decisions, and understand the democratic ideology (NCSS, 2012b). In his study on the inclusion of citizenship in school curriculum, Kerr (2005) proposes adults will be more active participants in civic and political activities if they are exposed to a higher level of civic knowledge as students.

Hess (2009) contends that teaching about controversial issues contributes to the development of students into civic-minded individuals and history and social science classes can serve as the venue for this. The incorporation of controversial issues into classrooms can be part of this change and create positive outcomes to prepare students to live in a democratic society if they are encouraged to explore, discuss opposing perspectives, and express their own views (Barton & McCully, 2007). Dewey (1922) proposed:

Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Not that it always effects [*sic*] this result; but that conflict is a *sine qua non* of reflection and ingenuity. (p. 300)

During the 2012 presidential election, President Obama endorsed same-sex marriage and Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, took the stance marriage is only between a man and a woman. Throughout the country these issues caused heated debates and had the potential to prompt discussions and debates when they permeated into classrooms. Loewen (2007) states homosexuality is a forbidden topic in classrooms, while issues such as women's rights and affirmative action are controversial. Regardless, it is probable the topic of homosexuality entered into recent lessons during the 2012 presidential election although the presidential election is so recent there is not yet literature available to reveal if or how this was discussed in classrooms.

Experience. In his book examining the philosophical and anthropological significance of place, Tilley (2012) defines various kinds of spaces and states they are “constructed in the concrete experiences of individuals socialized within a group” (p. 16). This “provides a basis for reflection and theorization with regard to understanding the others” (Tilley, 2012, p. 17). This indicates that discussions in classrooms are influenced by students' preconceived notions developed from experiences outside the classroom setting. Therefore, students and teachers can enter the learning environment with preconceived notions, beliefs, and values that can impact classroom discussion and lead to controversy within the academic setting.

The classroom. The concept and nature of controversial issues is clearly complex and value laden in terms of how controversial issues are defined and understood by teachers and students. There is complexity in the factors and decisions involved in determining if, and how, controversial issues are introduced and taught. When determining what a controversial issue is in the context of their classroom, and subsequently evaluating the possible impact of controversial issues on their students, teachers have to carefully consider how to appropriately

teach the subject or issue, for that matter, if it is even appropriate to broach the subject at all. According to Hess (2009), many teachers avoid teaching controversial issues or tread carefully with them. Teachers feel the need to have support from parents and administrators in order to tackle controversial issues within the context of the classroom for fear they will be accused of indoctrination (Hess, 2004). The 2013 government shutdown provided opportunities for classroom discussions, but the evident acrimonious division between our political parties and citizens may have been too controversial for many teachers to address. Hess (2004) states political rancor makes “the terrain of controversial issues teaching especially treacherous now” (p. 258).

When discussing controversial issues, teachers are often warned to be cautious so their students are not caused psychological damage (Baker, 2004). It can be overwhelming for teachers to create “psychological safety while also letting go of trying to control outcomes, emphasizing the importance of listening to learn, and preparing ourselves as faculty and facilitators to foster learning through the complexity of conflicting perspectives” (Baker, 2004, p. 705).

Conflict often causes discomfort in society, and the same can be true in classrooms, which may be why some teachers choose to teach within the realms of the mandated curriculum. If teachers incorporate controversial issues into classrooms, then a degree of discomfort becomes part of the learning experience. Washington and Humphries (2011) stress that novice teachers are not fundamentally trained to teach controversial issues, which may be a reason they often avoid hot-button issues. Even experienced teachers avoid the same issues because they “want to create environments in which students feel safe, valued, and respected. Controversial issues, by their very nature, can create passionate responses” (Hess, 2011). If controversial issues are

discussed in classrooms, students' knowledge can be expanded (King, 2009) and they become more engaged in lessons (Hess & Posselt, 2002). Though teachers may choose to avoid passionate discussions, classes can discuss "issues in civil and productive ways so that students bring a healthy amount of passion to the classroom without treating one another harshly" (Hess, 2011).

If teachers decide to incorporate controversial issues into their lessons, there are a plethora of avenues to do so. When teaching the Holocaust, Totten (2001) proposes that unrealistic versions should be avoided, such as in the *Diary of Anne Frank*. Some teachers find success in teaching the Holocaust as a moral lesson (Smyth, 2012) although Russell (2006) does not agree with this method. During Holocaust studies, Lindquist (2007) promotes the exploration of facts rather than attempts to evoke empathy. Often teachers choose to use simulations in an effort to elicit empathy, and Ruben (1999) and Pederson (1995) agree with this strategy, although others, such as the Anti-Defamation League (2012), disagree with the use of simulations in Holocaust studies and, instead, recommend reflective writing. It is a challenge to present multiple points of view in Holocaust studies, and Ducey (2009) stresses it is important to avoid sanctification of the Holocaust, but also warns it should not be simplified either. Ways to teach the Holocaust induces controversy, and the same is true for teaching 9/11 especially since it is recent, emotive history (Weir, 2006).

Due to events that have transpired in the world, teachers face the dilemma of how to teach the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This is an event that is not static and one that is surrounded with controversy, including how this should be taught to our students (Weir, 2006). Lessons on 9/11 "are just too important to ignore. They present the ultimate teachable moment" (Hess & Stoddard, 2007, p. 231). As memories fade of those who witnessed that fateful day either in

person or through the media, the lessons will need to be adapted so future generations will understand this horrific time in our history. Hess and Stoddard (2011) propose teachers provide the basic information on 9/11 (or any horrific event), to help students understand the complexity of the event, and provide multiple points of view to emphasize the issue is not static. Finally, teachers should not “feel so locked into their already developed curriculum that they fear taking the time to help their students make sense of what is happening in the world now” (Hess & Stoddard, 2011). The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) focuses on civic learning and engagement which emphasizes teaching students “skills, concepts, or ideas” (CIRCLE, 2010) when discussing 9/11 rather than simply regurgitating facts and having them realize it was an event in United States history.

Promoting citizenship. The Civic Mission of Schools in its 2003 report called upon teachers to incorporate discussion to “develop competent and responsible citizens who are informed on a range of public issues, equipped to participate thoughtfully in public debates, and aware of their own ability to make a difference” (Graseck, 2009, p. 46).

The development of our students into good citizens is just one goal of many teachers. The NCSS states:

Social studies educators teach students the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy. The mission of the NCSS is to provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators. (NCSS, 2012a)

Students will benefit from exposure to learning environments that are facilitated by engaging conversations about differing values, allowing them to discern varying points of view (Baker, 2004). The students can develop skills teaching them to think more critically, which if

this is done Hess (2002) proposes students will be more prepared for society if they are free to form their own opinions and values. Students need to be encouraged to ask questions because “there’s a big difference between information and knowledge; if information is to become knowledge, students need to think about it” (Goudvis & Harvey, 2012, p. 55). Hess (2002) asserts questions and discussion will help develop students into critical thinkers and hone interpersonal skills (Hess, 2002). Oulton et al. (2004) found there are multiple benefits in exposing students to controversial issues, such as increased knowledge, better analytical skills, good study skills, improved behavior, and a better attitude as well as overall richer values.

If students are exposed to controversial issues and encouraged to look at them from multiple perspectives and consider the varying viewpoints, they can learn to make educated decisions, which will help them to live as civic-minded individuals in a democracy (Hess, 2009). These topics may “arouse ambivalent sentiments, ranging from fear or respect to reverence” (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999, p. 219). With the varying opinions of how to teach controversial issues, one goal remains constant, which is to encourage teachers to prepare students to be good citizens and contributing members of our society. Loewen (2007) stresses the importance of teachers preparing students for citizenship since they are the ones who will be fighting our next war. There has been a longstanding discussion of the benefits of incorporation of controversial issues into classrooms as evinced when over fifty years ago members of the New York Board of Education asserted controversial issues would create good citizens (Hechinger, 1960a). More recently Hess (2009) proposed the incorporation of controversial issues teach students the art of discussion, which is necessary to maintain the “health of a democracy” (p. 12). Since high school is the last stop before adulthood, Grasek (2009) promotes the discussion of controversial issues whereby students can become informed about issues, learn to debate, and

realize they can make a difference in our society. Teaching students to do this through the discussion of controversial issues is part of the political process (National Conference on Citizenship, 2011) and can help fulfill the duties of citizenship in a democracy (NCSS, 2012a). What will be best for our students? If we want to develop good citizens, then we should consider setting aside any apprehension and understand “history is unceasingly controversial because it provides so much of the substance for the way a society defines itself and considers what it wants to be” (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000, p. 7).

Teacher experience. Regardless of the benefits offered by discussing controversial topics in history and social science classrooms, literature has established that fear still grips many teachers and prevents them from taking the leap from the safety of their district’s preapproved curriculum and textbook to topics that may push the limits into dangerous teaching (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999). It is also evident that teachers’ self-efficacy plays a role in how they teach. For example, Hendrix (1981) interviewed white teachers who were not comfortable teaching black studies courses because of their admitted lack of knowledge and inability to relate to the lives of Blacks and Hess (2009) verifies many teachers avoid topics because of their perceived lack of knowledge. In their study of teaching in a racially diverse environment, Landsman and Lewis (2006) found “children construct their world within a sociocultural context” (p. 101) and this can be particularly difficult for white teachers teaching black students. In his study examining educators’ inabilities to help students understand the role of race and racism in United States history, Howard (2004) asserts many teachers will avoid topics altogether in order to minimize the chance controversy will become part of their lessons. This was true with the Vietnam War when Apple and Weiss (1983) found teachers completely avoided the topic or simplified the lesson in order to minimize the degree of controversy since it

is difficult to write about recent, emotive history “that hasn’t reached its conclusion” (Weir, 2006). Cowan and Maitles (2012) state teachers still struggle with ways to teach the Holocaust, including decisions of whose perspective should be taught, how the points of view should be taught (Lindquist, 2007), or even if they should be taught (Rowley, 2011).

Washington and Humphries (2011) identify four stances teachers take when teaching controversial issues. The first is *Exclusive Neutrality*, whereby teachers may avoid controversial issues and abide by the established curriculum. Secondly, some teachers may use issues of controversy to promote their own points of view through the stance of *Exclusive Partiality*. Washington and Humphries (2011) continue by identifying the stance of *Neutral Impartiality* when teachers do not share their points of view with students but still cultivate discussion of controversial issues. Finally, through the stance of *Committed Impartiality*, teachers will incorporate controversial issues into their lessons, but also “disclose their point of view purposefully and explicitly during discussion” (Washington & Humphries, 2011, p. 112).

It is recommended by Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn (2000) that students be exposed to multiple points of view, be encouraged to reflect on what they are taught, analyze their new knowledge, and attempt to interpret what they have learned. Hand and Levinson (2012) propose the facilitation of discussion is vital to nourish students’ understanding of issues. There is not a single way to teach controversial topics, and it is a decision that must ultimately be made by educators. Teachers will decide if they choose to simply complete a laundry list of the required material so students will exhibit success on the state-mandated test or whether they will teach beyond the minimum required and include controversial issues (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000).

The literature provides examples of teachers successfully using strategies to teach controversial issues while avoiding possible pitfalls. Kuypers (2002) states the ways students are

approached is important, and strategies should be implemented where issues, such as race relations, can be viewed with a critical lens through multiple points of view (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011). Landsman and Lewis (2006) recommend in diverse classrooms, teachers should be “prepared to navigate issues of racism and cultural illiteracy” (p. 101). Additionally, teachers will need to be knowledgeable about the subject matter and feel comfortable with the topic (Bielby, 1999). Van Gigch (2011) proposes when teaching controversial issues, such as war, they should be approached from multiple perspectives, which will provide students with a more realistic lens.

Emotional impact. In a study to understand obstacles when teaching controversial social issues, Evans, Avery, & Pederson (1999) state some controversial issues may be more acceptable than others in classrooms. For instance, they found discussion of the Vietnam War and race relations were deemed acceptable in many classrooms whereas sexual topics were not. In their study, they found more personal issues were not considered appropriate for classroom discussion and caused discomfort (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999). In researching ways to directly discuss controversial issues to catalyze learning, Baker (2004) found there are, indeed, teachers who challenge students to move beyond their comfort zone. Loewen (2007) recommends graphic images, such as from the My Lai Massacre, be used in classrooms regardless of the controversy attached to them so students receive a more authentic view of war. Lindquist (2006) argues these graphic images should be used sparingly, and the truth should be presented without traumatizing students.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 “and the ensuing crisis, without any question, have raised acutely the significance of citizenship in conducting and regulating the global war on terror” (Schuck, 2007). Since the terrorist attacks, there have been

disputes on how to teach students about 9/11. In the *New York Times*, Zernike (2002) reported there are two opposing sides in how this should be taught. One side promotes lesson plans that help students understand Islamic beliefs. The opposing side, labeled as conservative, believes there should be more focus on the history of the day and less on emotions. The conservatives argue there is too much focus on tolerance rather than placing blame for the attacks and have even labeled the less conservative educators as unpatriotic (Zernike, 2002). A 9/11 lesson plan was available on the NCSS website that included a fictional story about an Iraqi boy named Osama who was being teased by his peers. Critics state emotional stories (such as the NCSS fictional story) distract from the events of that day. Zernike (2002) asserts “discrimination is always a concern, but what we learned on Sept. 11 was not that Americans discriminate against Arabs.” On the opposing side, the emotional story of Osama could have been beneficial to schools that had anti-bullying policies in effect. It had the potential to help students deal with the fresh memory of the terrorist attacks, but also provided a lens into the life of one who is being bullied.

When teaching controversial issues, teachers are treading into contentious issues and risk repercussions from students, parents, other teachers, or administrators (Bielby, 1999). Philpott et al. (2011) interviewed six social studies teachers to understand if they were willing to discuss controversial issues in their classrooms. One teacher, Leslie, stated she would discuss topics in “the mandated curriculum but that she would not ‘bring any of my own out’ into the classroom for fear of consequences” (Philpott et al., 2011, p. 39). Another teacher, Bruce, stated “his school system wants ‘to avoid the discussion of controversial issues just because it can lead to complaints from the community’” (Philpott et al., 2011, p. 39). Some teachers choose to glaze over sensitive topics to avoid the possibility of any feeling of discomfort with either their

students or themselves (Cowan & Maitles, 2012). Philpott et al. (2011) find it problematic that “today’s teachers have received almost no preparation or training related to how to deal with the sensitive topic of controversy . . . that needs to change” (p. 42). In order to avoid repercussions, teachers need to be equipped “with strategies to appropriately handle the discussion of such issues” (Washington & Humphries, 2011, p. 112).

The NCSS continuously seeks to support and strengthen social studies education. They support academic freedom so controversial issues can be incorporated into history and social science classes, which will provide students with skills to analyze social problems, evaluate evidence that promotes critical reasoning, examine varying viewpoints, and realize that compromise is part of living in a democratic society (NCSS, 2007). Without the ability to practice academic freedom, the result will be an infringement on teachers’ abilities to teach controversial issues, which in turn will restrict meaningful student learning (Misco & Patterson, 2007). The power to teach controversial issues is incumbent upon academic freedom, which “is recognized by the NCSS as a fundamental element in teaching excellence and in the maintenance of our culture and government” (NCSS, 2007).

Standards. Novice teachers face many challenges in their first years of teaching and van Hover, Hicks, and Irwin (2007) assert the “high-stakes accountability measures only exacerbate the stress and pressure faced by beginning teachers” (p. 90). In a study by Ravitch (2007) on the findings of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, in order to produce well-prepared, intelligent students it is recommended schools be competitive and when hiring teachers, only recruit “the best and the brightest” (Ravitch, 2007, p. 269). Many teachers fear they will lose their job if students do not demonstrate success on high-stakes tests and their fears may be justified. Teachers look for new strategies to enhance learning in the classroom and

prepare students for the high-stakes test. In case studies by Grant and Gradwell (2010) focusing on the challenges of teaching history through units framed around a big idea, Michael Meyer, a new teacher in a wealthy, suburban New York school, was told by his principal, “Just so there is no confusion about whether or not you should be teaching to the tests, let me be clear: teach to the test—it is how you will be evaluated” (Meyer, 2010, p. 23). This is contrary to President Obama’s statement in his 2012 State of the Union Address indicating changes need to be made to “grant schools flexibility: To teach with creativity and passion; to stop teaching to the test” (Obama, 2012). The National Conference on Citizenship values controversy and views it as “ever-present in democratic nations, and that is as it should be, since controversy is an intrinsic part of the political process and is necessary for the very survival of democracy” (National Conference on Citizenship, 2011).

There is also the challenge teachers face to manage all of this with the requirements of state-mandated tests looming over them. Teachers attempt to create a balance in classrooms where students are preparing for high-stakes tests, but are also learning more than the state’s minimum required to demonstrate competency in the subject matter. To go beyond the basic knowledge required in a history and social science course, teachers need for students to understand the complexity of issues and realize they are not settled (Hess & Stoddard, 2011). While doing all of this, it is important for teachers to maintain a positive relationship with parents, administrators, and the community, all of who have their own demands on these teachers. Parents want their children to be successful in classrooms, and many typically believe this is incumbent upon teachers. Administrators expect teachers to follow the curriculum to prepare students for the high-stakes tests while exhibiting classroom management skills and fulfilling

other duties outside of classrooms. The community expects teachers to serve as a role model for students and prepare them for good citizenship.

Teaching can be exhilarating, but that does not diminish the immense amount of pressure teachers can experience “with state scores determining more and more the formal curriculum, public schools are driven to produce higher and higher test results. In these settings, learning and teaching offer thin and shallow depictions of our worlds” (Liston & Garrison, 2004, p. 111).

Focusing on teachers in the State of Virginia, van Hover, Hicks, and Irwin (2007), found

Within the state of Virginia, it is possible to find, on the one hand, studies that detail how teachers have found ways to creatively design instruction to meet the needs of the state test, and, on the other hand, studies that reveal how the standards of learning have constrained, limited, and narrowed what teachers feel they are capable of doing. (p. 91).

There are teachers who desire to incorporate controversial topics into their lessons to promote discussion and debate that will emanate critical thinking. Kent den Heyer (2005), of the University of Alberta, promotes questions where students can connect what they learn in the classroom into their lives (den Heyer, 2005). If teachers cross into this dangerous teaching, den Heyer (2005) proposes it will “help students connect what they learn in schools to politically charged debates over what is worth knowing . . . to make sense of their personal identities and social commitments” (p. 2). However, this may be intimidating, particularly for novice teachers who do not want to risk losing their jobs.

Concluding Remarks

Teaching is one of the most challenging professions one can choose, but can also be extremely rewarding. Many enter the field of teaching because they are enamored with learning and want to have an impact on the lives of others. Novice teachers enter classrooms and are quickly cognizant of the decisions and pressures teachers face. They want to engage their students in learning and develop them into critical thinkers and life-long learners. It is for that reason many teachers desire to incorporate controversial topics into their lessons to promote discussion and debate that will emanate critical thinking.

Although students enter the classroom with preconceived notions, they are also influenced by what they learn in school, which can include controversial issues. These issues can prevent students from being taught as if they “are frozen at some definite intellectual state, and thus as if they are incapable of further growth or development” (Phillips & Soltis, 2009). Controversial issues can challenge an individual’s belief system within a society. These issues are not static and teachers play a vital role in choosing how they will broach these issues. Thornton (2005) promotes the role of teachers as gatekeepers because they make informed decisions on how to incorporate controversial issues based on previous strategies utilized as well as the resulting successes and challenges (Kruger, 2012). It is not uncommon for teachers to either avoid controversial issues or tread carefully when discussing them (Hess, 2009). The identified four stances teachers take toward controversial issues provide a lens into various ways they approach controversial issues in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms (Hess, 2005; Philpott et al., 2011; Washington & Humphries, 2011). These stances indicate teachers:

- avoid issues and abide by the established curriculum
- use issues of controversy to promote their own points of view

- do not share their points of view with students, but still cultivate discussion of controversial issues
- incorporate controversial issues into their lessons while also disclosing “their point of view purposefully and explicitly during discussion” (Washington & Humphries, 2011, p. 112).

However, the stance each teacher adopts in the classroom (Washington & Humphries, 2011) can influence their decisions because issues may be uncomfortable to discuss and cause a division within a society (Philpott et al., 2011). Regardless of the discomfort controversial issues can cause, Hess (2009) states students will develop into good citizens if controversial issues are incorporated into lessons. Evans, Avery, & Pederson (1999) found some controversial issues are identified as more acceptable than others for classroom discussions. Bielby (1999) claims teachers’ knowledge of the topic and comfort in discussing issues contributes to the palatability of issues in classrooms. Therefore, as gatekeepers, teachers determine which issues will be discussed in classrooms and how they will be presented to students.

Controversial issues will continue to exist although the topics will continue to change over time, and the question is how teachers will handle these with students in a culturally diverse nation. If teachers are to educate students to become critical thinkers and good citizens, then it may necessitate the need to address controversial issues. Understanding history and social science can assist students in becoming good citizens, and teachers may follow the lead of “most historians, who believe that *amor patriae* is nurtured by looking squarely at the past, warts and all. Only this clear-sightedness will obviate the cynicism that sugar-coated history produces when youngsters get older and recognize ‘the lies my teacher told me’” (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000, p. 15).

Teachers have the ability to serve as positive role models for students, and to do this they will want to be honest with their students about our history and not choose to educate with half-truths. This is likely to be a delicate balance, but educators have the ability to “create a space for honest and collective self-reflection and inquiry rather than closing off discussion” (Boler, 1999, p. 187). If students are exposed to and allowed to discuss controversial topics, then they will be better able to develop their own opinions and values. If not, “teaching children historical subject matter has no point if we do not ask them to reflect on it. Research has shown clearly that students remember history better when they are given the opportunity to weigh, analyze, and interpret it” (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000, p. 273).

Summary

The literature highlights not only the potential, but also the provisos of using controversial issues in the classroom. Many advocates of controversial issues, such as Barton and McCully (2007), Brooks (2002), Hess (2004, 2009), and the NCSS (2012b) suggest that when teachers use controversial issues in their classrooms it promotes critical thinking through teaching the art of discussion and debate through multiple perspectives. Similarly, Schank (2011) states a “history teacher at his worst teaches facts, and at his best teaches careful analysis of sources of facts” (p. 17) and “knowledge alone is meaningless because teaching is not about the transfer of knowledge” (p. 23). Yet, the literature also highlights the difficulties facing teachers when looking to use controversial issues in their classrooms (Baker, 2004; Bielby, 1999; Burkstrand-Reid, Carbone, & Hendricks, 2011; Diamond, 2007; Philpott et al., 2011). To successfully incorporate controversial issues into lessons, teachers need to have a firm hold on the concepts of the topics, serve as provocateurs, and create a learning environment that is safe and respectful (Brooks, 2002). This is a task that is clearly easier said than done and I was

interested to discover if teachers are willing to grapple with these issues. If controversial issues hold so much promise yet also a great deal of danger, it needs to be examined what factors influenced teachers if they broached such topics. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation is to understand factors that shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues into their teaching of United States History in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom as well as the factors they consider influential in creating controversy.

Chapter Three

Methodology

To understand the role of United States History teachers in a standards-based, high-stakes testing course, I examined factors that contributed to controversy as well as their willingness to discuss controversial topics in the classroom. The basis of my research was on that of Philpott et al. (2011), and I sought to answer the following questions:

Overarching Question

What factors shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues in their teaching of United States History in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

Supporting Question

What factors do secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating the controversy attached to an issue discussed in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

While the research of Philpott et al. (2011) was beneficial, it was rather broad since it encompassed six teachers from different history and social science courses. I focused my research specifically on secondary level United States History teachers in the Commonwealth of Virginia, who designed their lessons from the standards outlined by the Department of Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Additionally, the Board of Education for the Virginia Department of Education (2008) stated in the Virginia and United States History course standards "The study of history must emphasize the intellectual skills required for responsible citizenship. Students practice these skills as they extend their understanding of the essential knowledge defined by the standards for history and social science" (p. 11).

In the section below, I outline my guide used for my research. I interviewed participants in the natural setting of their classrooms and qualitative research was used to answer my questions. Qualitative research is difficult to define and is an umbrella term for methods used to study natural social life (Burgess, 1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state:

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own. (p. 6-7)

There are multiple paradigms attached to qualitative research, and yet, it is still too evasive to specifically define. Qualitative research “is imbued with a large body of methods and practices, and transverses several disciplines” (Lee, 2012, p. 404). Burgess (1985) asserted the characteristics of qualitative research as:

1. The researcher works in a natural setting, such as in a classroom.
2. The methods of collecting data are very flexible and allows for modification of strategies.
3. Researchers are concerned with the social processes and meaning of their data, which can be supported by a phenomenological theoretical framework.
4. Data collection and analysis can occur simultaneously and are not required to take place through separate and individual stages.

Specifically, I used qualitative phenomenological research (Saldana, 2011), which emphasizes the interpretation of understanding human interaction (Darity, 2008), and due to the degree of interaction between teachers and students, it was important to understand how teachers interpreted issues deemed controversial.

Understanding the thinking that supports practices in the classroom mandates an identification and analysis of teachers' core concepts, defined as teachers' knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, and images. (Shavelson & Stern, 1981)

Knowledge and lived experiences influenced teachers, which translated into their classrooms.

Education provided an avenue for individuals to construct meaning that would transmit to other generations, which was best studied through a phenomenological interpretation (Hurst, 1987).

This aided researchers in understanding participants as members of a social group and demonstrated how "meanings, beliefs, and intention . . . help to constitute their action"

(Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, p. 14). I used a phenomenological approach in my research to understand why the participants deemed certain issues controversial in their standards, I also

attempted to understand ways they constructed knowledge, interconnected it to their personal experiences, and if that determined how these issues translated into what was taught in

classrooms. Anfara and Mertz (2006) proposed phenomenology provided a lens into individuals' consciousness, how their mindfulness was structured, and also helped in understanding events with people in specific situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

I interviewed secondary level United States History teachers to understand which issues they considered controversial, as well as those in their state-mandated standards they deemed controversial. I also wanted to understand the factors that influenced how these issues were discussed in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom, the utility if these issues were broached in the classroom, and if they viewed controversial issues as an avenue to prepare students to be civic-minded individuals. I anticipated a solidification of my findings in the literature that controversial issues in classrooms could teach students to examine multiple

perspectives whereby they learned skills to debate, discuss, understand varying points of view, and make educated decisions, which would prepare them to live in a democratic nation.

Limitations

Psathas (1973) stresses phenomenological researchers must remain silent to fully understand what their subjects are saying. This is a strategy practiced by phenomenologists since they may not attach the same meaning to things as the individuals they are studying (Douglas, 1976), and by remaining silent, researchers gain insight into the ideas of their subjects (Geertz, 1973). With thirteen years of personal classroom experience, I admittedly had preconceived notions of the factors that I believed influenced what teachers deemed as controversial as well as factors that influenced their teaching. Since I personally had preferred methods for teaching controversial topics, through a phenomenological approach to my research, I consciously had to remain silent and not interject in interviews with my personal thoughts so any bias of my own would not be evident (Psathas, 1973; Douglas, 1976).

Prior to this research, I previously taught in the central Virginia area in the same school as three of my participants' and had collaborated with another participant in the same school district. My previous relationships may have been beneficial since the participants were comfortable speaking with me. However, being an acquaintance also had the potential to create a limitation since the participants may have chosen to tell me what they thought I expected to hear rather than being completely honest in their views of controversial issues and their procedures when they taught them. Prior to the interviews, I had not met three of the Dade County 11th grade participants, but through Virginia Tech had a previous working relationship with the 6th and 7th grade participants I interviewed.

Another limitation was my use of convenience sampling. I used this because of my previous relationship with the participants and their close proximity to me. This type of approach was not the most desirous since participants possibly did not provide a true representation of the population that would be beneficial for research in this type of study (Trochim, 2006).

The dominant limitation in this research was that I chose only to examine the teachers' perceptions of controversial issues and incorporation of them into their lessons. Some participants provided resources they had used in the classroom, but there were not any classroom observations. Therefore, the way participants actually approached the teaching of controversial issues or interacted with students when these issues were broached was not witnessed, but based on the teachers' perceptions of how controversial issues were addressed within the context of their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms.

Participants and Setting

After I received approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the procedural methods of recruiting and interviewing participants as well as the interview questions (Appendix A), I contacted the superintendents for both Burch County School District and Dade County School District (Appendix B) and sought approval to conduct the interviews. After receiving permission from each district, I contacted the principals for Red River High School and Spencer Heights High School in Burch County, as well as Griffith Middle School, Leesburg Middle School, and Leesburg High School in Dade County and asked permission to recruit United States History teachers for my research. After each building principal gave their approval, I emailed sixteen secondary level social studies teachers in these schools and inquired if they were interested in participating in my research. I received responses from fourteen teachers who

stated they were interested and willing to participate in the research, but only twelve teachers eventually agreed to be interviewed. United States History to 1865 is taught in the 6th grade and United States History: 1865 to Present is taught in the 7th grade in Dade County. However, in Burch County, United States History: 1865 to Present is taught in the 6th grade. Virginia and United States History, as well as Advanced Placement United States History, are taught in 11th grade in both counties.

The twelve secondary level United States History teachers who agreed to be interviewed were a sufficient number for the research according to the findings of Saldana (2011). Using purposeful sampling, I chose United States History teachers because they could, as a small sample, increase the utility of my research (Patton, 1980) since they taught the topics deemed most controversial by the literature of scholars. The twelve teachers (Appendix C) taught one or more of the following in the Commonwealth of Virginia: United States History to 1865, United States History: 1865 to Present, Virginia and United States History, and Advanced Placement United States History. In conjunction with the purposeful sampling, I used convenience sampling. Although convenience sampling is not the most desirable method of choosing participants, I chose this method for several reasons:

- I had an established relationship with my chosen schools.
- The schools were geographically located close to me.
- Due to my previous contact with the schools and some of the participants, it was less challenging to receive permission from the school districts, principals, and teachers to conduct my research.

Although convenience sampling risked the possibility of restriction of my research, the interviews were colloquial, which I assert actually resulted in richer interviews.

The only criteria in choosing my participants were:

- Participants teach a minimum of one course of United States History
- Participants teach in public schools
- All schools were located in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Because I used convenience sampling and the schools I had access to were relatively small with a small number of secondary level United States History teachers, in choosing my participants, I did not consider their gender, race, age, overall years of teaching experience, the number of years they had taught United States History, or whether their course was identified as special education, standard, honors, or Advanced Placement. However, during the interview and data analysis, all of this was noted. During the research, however, I did compare each teacher's SOL course score with the average for their school, district, and the Commonwealth of Virginia (Table 1).

Table 1 – Participants' Schools: Enrollment and Eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch

School	Student Enrollment	Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch
Leesburg High School (Dade County)	1,110	19%
Leesburg Middle School (Dade County)	826	23%
Griffith Middle School (Dade County)	219	65%
Spencer Heights School (Burch County)	741	39%
Red River High School (Burch County)	888	40%

The research participants were located in two different school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia, in mid-Western Virginia and Central Virginia (Table 1). Six interviews took place in each of the two school districts in a total of five different schools. One school, Leesburg High School, was located in mid-Western Virginia and was the location for three interviews of 11th grade teachers. The school had grades 9th through 12th, with 1,110 enrolled students, and in 2012 had a passage rate of 89% on the history SOL tests (Virginia Department of Education, 2013), and 19% of its students were eligible for free or reduced lunches (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). The second school was Leesburg Middle School, which had 6th through 8th grades and was the location for two interviews. The school had 826 students with a passage rate of 87% on the history SOL tests (Virginia Department of Education, 2012), and 23% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunches (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). Griffith Middle School was the final school for interviews in the mid-Western Virginia school district. It had 6th through 8th grades, an enrollment of 219 students, and in 2012 had a passage rate of 77% on the history SOL tests (Virginia Department of Education, 2012), and 65% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunches. In central Virginia, participants were from two separate schools in the same school district. The first, Spencer Heights School was a combined school that included 6th grade through 12th grade. It had 741 students and a passage rate for the history SOL tests of 86% in 2012 (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). Red River High School was the second school in the central Virginia district and included 9th grade through 12th grade. It had 888 students, 83% of whom passed the history SOL tests in 2012 (Virginia Department of Education, 2012). Students who were eligible to receive free or reduced lunches were 41% at the former school and 39% at the latter (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). I briefly focus on students who receive free or

reduced lunches because, according to Ready (2010), there has been a strong correlation between social class, attendance, and cognitive abilities with schools having more influence on students of a lower socioeconomic status. All of the schools were fully accredited by the Commonwealth of Virginia and their history SOL tests passage rates were close to or above the state average of 85% (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). Each school followed a traditional schedule with classes lasting 45 to 50 minutes.

The participants included twelve secondary level educators who taught 6th, 7th, or 11th grades in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The participants consisted of six male, six female, and all were White. Each participant taught one or more of the following:

- United States History to 1865
- United States History: 1865 to Present
- Virginia and United States History
- Advanced Placement United States History

Six participants taught in Burch County (pseudonym) located in Central Virginia and six taught in Dade County (pseudonym) in mid-Western Virginia. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, schools, and districts.

Alice. As a native of Burch County, Alice was reared in the small town where she resided and taught. She graduated from Red River High School, as did the majority of her relatives. Alice taught 11th grade Virginia and United States History and Advanced Placement (AP) United States History for seven years, all at Red River High School. At the time of the research, she taught full-time, was working toward an Ed.D. and was expecting her second child. Alice stated she enjoyed teaching, but indicated her high school teaching career would end

within the next two years after she completed her Ed.D. Alice stated she would “stay in the classroom for the next thirty years,” but it was not financially feasible for her family.

Jerry. Directly across the hall from Alice was Jerry, who taught Virginia and United States History as well as 9th grade World History I. Jerry had taught for six years, five of which included Virginia and United States History. Like Alice, he grew up in Burch County, but attended a different high school in the same school district. Jerry was a political science major in college, but said he wanted to return to Burch County to teach and coach baseball. He stated he enjoyed teaching and felt he had a good rapport with his students,

Elizabeth. Prior to her teaching career, Elizabeth worked for Virginia’s Parole Board. At the time of the research, it was her first year at Red River High School as a special education teacher and she co-taught a Virginia and United States History class with Alice. Elizabeth also taught Virginia and United States History in a self-contained classroom for special education students who were not mainstreamed into core classes. She previously taught at Spencer Heights School, also in Burch County, for nine years and stated she requested a transfer because of administrative changes that had been made two years ago. Elizabeth emphasized there were no regrets about her decision to transfer to Red River High School and was very happy there and could not imagine any other profession than teaching.

Neal. A veteran teacher of 32 years, Neal had always taught Virginia and United States History as well as AP United States History. Neal served as the sponsor of the Spencer Heights School’s Junior Class and Community Outreach Service Club. He came to Spencer Heights School 22 years ago from a neighboring school district so he would be closer to his home. Though his father was a career Marine, Neal predominantly lived in Burch County as a child and graduated from Spencer Heights School. Neal shared he had a no-nonsense attitude and was

straightforward with his speech inside and outside the classroom and attributed this to being reared in a military family.

In an effort to increase his knowledge of United States History, Neal regularly attended summer workshops and annually served as a grader for the AP Exams. Neal stated he previously enjoyed teaching, but administrators were trying too many new strategies and required meetings had increased tremendously since the county implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Neal stated he did not like what Burch County implemented because his SOL scores had always been good and he would like “to be left alone to teach.” He added that he planned to retire in approximately three years.

Emily. A former student of Neal’s, Emily taught 6th grade United States History: 1865 to Present at Spencer Heights School. This was her fourth year in the classroom and she stated her desire to become a teacher was the love of history she learned from a previous teacher. She added this teacher aspired to make every day interesting for her students and modeled how students could be treated as young adults and taught them responsibility, yet allowed them to grow from their mistakes. Emily stated she strived to model this practice with her own students.

Emily served as a coach to the girl’s junior varsity basketball team. Although Emily thoroughly enjoyed coaching and teaching, she planned to leave education in two years to pursue a nursing degree. Due to the aforementioned administrative changes at Spencer Heights School, Emily was not happy in her working environment and planned to make a career change rather than transfer to another school. She stated she would continue in the field of education if she could “simply teach,” but she was required to serve on numerous committees, attended a plethora of meetings, and performed extra duties that were required by her principal. Emily added

teachers were frustrated and the workload had increased, but none had received a salary increase for five years.

Sharon. Sharon taught 6th grade at Spencer Heights School for her entire teaching career of eighteen years. For sixteen years she taught 6th grade math and two years ago a social studies teaching position was eliminated due to budget cuts and Sharon was assigned to teach United States History: 1865 to Present. She always liked history, but it had been a difficult transition from teaching math. During her first year of teaching history, Sharon perceived it was the administration's way to push her out of the classroom via early retirement due to her students' low SOL scores. Sharon stated she had contemplated whether she would continue to teach, though she enjoyed the students.

Conrad. At Griffith Middle School in Dade County, Conrad taught both 6th grade United States History to 1865 and 7th grade United States History: 1865 to Present. During his childhood, Conrad lived in Cleveland, Ohio, close to a large university and was exposed to people from different cultures. He was reared in a conservative home and lived in a predominantly white, upper middle class neighborhood. Conrad moved to Dade County where he taught United States History: 1865 to Present for his entire teaching career of 15 years; however, this year he was teaching one class of United States History to 1865. He stated he enjoyed teaching middle school and had no desire to teach any grade level other than 6th grade or 7th grade. Conrad served as a cooperating teacher for interns and student teachers for several years from the local university.

Janet. As a teacher in the same county as Conrad, but at Leesburg Middle School, Janet had taught Language Arts and United States History: 1865 to Present for 21 years. Janet emphasized the combination of her courses was beneficial to her and the students and stated she

would not want to teach any other way. She also seized opportunities and attended professional development workshops. Janet stated she chose a topic each year and read everything she could about it to become an expert. At the time of this research, she was studying the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. She had attended a workshop on this and was reading books to enhance her knowledge. Janet had also served as a cooperating teacher for many student teachers from the local university.

Lisa. As a native of Dade County, Lisa attended college in Louisiana. She returned to her community to teach and had taught at Leesburg Middle School for 19 years where she taught United States History to 1865 for 17 years. Lisa stated she could not imagine another career other than teaching and often referred to her students as “her babies.” She stated she always attempted to make learning meaningful to her students and especially enjoyed when students told her years after they left her class they remembered an activity from her class. Lisa added that she had wonderful colleagues and her classroom was the nucleus for her 6th grade colleagues. For several years Lisa served as a cooperating teacher for student teachers from the local university.

Simon. As a child from a conservative, Roman Catholic, and military family, Simon predominantly attended private schools as a student. His parents always encouraged him to think independently and not be a follower. As a Navy officer, his father stressed the importance of Simon carefully considering his actions, which also had to be explained. Simon spent the majority of his youth in South Carolina and it was a 9th grade history teacher who revealed how history interconnects with life. During the time of the research, it was Simon’s fifth year of teaching, all of which had been at Leesburg High School. He had taught World History I his entire teaching career, but this was his first year of teaching AP United States History. He

enjoyed United States History and taught it during his student teaching placement in a metropolitan area and stated he felt very comfortable with the course content as well as his students.

Mark. As a native of northern California, Mark taught at Leesburg High School. He had been teaching for fourteen years and had taught Virginia and United States History for twelve years. Mark came from a family of educators and at the beginning of his teaching career he often relied on them for advice. He shared that he found Dade County to be very different from living in northern California, which tended to be more liberal. Mark previously taught in a neighboring county and found it to be much more conservative than Leesburg High School. Mark shared he enjoyed teaching at Leesburg High School, and had supportive administration, which he did not feel he had at his previous school.

Ben. In his twelfth year of teaching at Leesburg High School, Ben taught Virginia and United States History as well as AP United States History during his entire career. Ben grew up in Dade County and attended a local university that he stated allowed him to be exposed to diverse individuals. Ben attributed his self-proclaimed conservatism to being reared in a very religious home and found he was much more conservative than his colleagues. Ben stated he enjoyed teaching and did not plan to leave the profession. He also added that he did not stray from the standards because he did not want to risk losing his job.

Data collection. I wanted to use an open-ended interview method, however, the standard open-ended interview method is typically used when participants will only be interviewed once and characteristically consisted of detailed questions that were asked exactly as they were written (Patton, 1980). I did not believe this best fitted as a means to serve my research so I used Patton's (1980) recommended informal conversational interview, which was the

phenomenological approach to interviewing. This style of interview had its challenges according to Patton (1980) because it required the interviewer to have strong interview skills and the ability to “easily interact with people in a variety of settings, generate rapid insights, formulate questions quickly and smoothly, and guard against asking questions that impose interpretations on the situation by the structure of the questions” (p. 200). Harrell and Bradley (2009) stated an interviewer’s continuum of structure could be from unstructured to highly structured. For the purposes of this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews since I had a topic and questions that guided my questioning (Appendix A), but I was also flexible in pursuing information.

Regardless of the interviewing challenges, according to Patton (2002) and Patten (2011), this phenomenological approach allowed me flexibility to pursue information in an appropriate direction based on the answers to predetermined questions. Since I interviewed teachers on controversial issues, this model worked nicely to guide our conversation because I was not sure of the interview path. I began with descriptive questions and encouraged participants to answer narratively, but followed with probing questions when necessary to clarify their answers (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Narrative inquiry was a good fit for the constructivist framework since it was socially situated and interactive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Additionally, how each participant viewed controversial issues influenced the questioning. This phenomenological style of interviewing required me, as the researcher, to “go with the flow” (Patton, 1980, p. 199).

The data was collected during a face-to-face interview with each participant, follow-up interviews of five participants, and two focus groups interviews where each group consisted of two formerly interviewed participants. The individual and follow-up interviews took place in each participant’s classroom and the focus group interviews took place in one of the participating

individual's classroom. In the focus groups, rather than having formal interview questions, I allowed the participants to discuss anything they wanted to add to our previous conversation. I chose the participants' classrooms and allowed the focus groups to choose which teacher's classroom the interview would take place because according to Gardner and LaPaglia (2006), it was best to interview participants in their natural setting since they would be more at ease and possibly more prone to openly and honestly discuss issues. The initial interviews took place at the end of the school day, and the follow-up and focus group interviews took place during the participants' planning periods. I asked each participant to close the classroom door in an effort to avert possible interruptions since the interviews were digitally recorded as Gardner and LaPaglia (2006) recommended interviews take place in a quiet setting where all noise (even white noise) could be controlled. Each interview lasted between 45 and 105 minutes, follow-up interviews lasted from 15 to 30 minutes, and the focus group interviews lasted 30 minutes. During each interview, I noted the classroom environment and any change in participants' tone of voice or body language. All participants, schools, and districts were assured they would be identified by pseudonyms.

My initial questions gathered background information including demographics, teaching experiences, and students' performance on SOL tests. I asked each participant how they would define a controversial issue and I then showed them a graphic organizer of scholars' definitions of controversial issues (Appendix D) garnered from the review of literature, and each participant stated whether or not they agreed with the definitions. Participants were asked to share their use of controversial issues in their classes and discussed pedagogical strategies used. I inquired about current teaching practices and how they handled what they deemed controversial issues in the classroom setting. These questions served as a guide to delve into how these teachers

broached controversial issues in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. Impromptu probing questions were asked as a result of on-the-spot analysis of participants' responses to previous questions. In addition to interviews, I asked the participants to share resources, handouts, or other materials they used in teaching to help illuminate how instruction transpired in their classroom.

For my data collection, I attempted to have a casual conversational exchange to avoid a perceived unbalanced relationship that would have resulted in the possible limitation (Hinchey, Mamana, & Steele, 1997). Hinchey, Mamana and Steele (1997) found classroom teachers often distrusted university professors or scholars and assumed researchers are out of touch with life in the classroom because it had likely been years since they taught outside of the collegiate setting, if they ever had. Some teachers asserted that what university scholars promoted in the classroom might be beneficial in theory, but not in practice. Hinchey, Mamana, and Steele (1997) found there were teachers who presumed when they interacted with university educators, it was necessary to tolerate the professors' arrogance since they were considered the experts in pedagogical practices. I did not experience any problems during the interviews and easily interacted with all participants.

Data analysis. Narrative analysis recognizes stories shared not only provide information, but also insight into our lived experiences (Thorne, 2000). I chose this strategy since insights into the data collection assisted in organization as a whole, and allowed me to connect and expose "the consequences of actions and events over time" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This was appropriate for examining the issues the participants deemed controversial because according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), participants could describe their thoughts, feelings, and how they interpreted the issues. This allowed the researcher to

develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in, the material they studied; they develop their own voice as they construct others' voices and realities; they narrate 'results' in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 657)

Qualitative research relies on inductive reasoning, which I used since data collection and analysis was concurrent (Thorne, 2000). I incorporated Patton's (1980) model, used data collected from interviews, and remained open-minded to seek patterns in each participant's interview. After I identified patterns from each participant, I searched for commonalities between all participants. The interview process created a phenomenal experience resulting in an approach that was inductive and discovery-oriented (Patton, 1980).

There was not a consensus on a single path to code in qualitative research, and many researchers used a combination of approaches, although Gough and Scott (2000) found there was a relationship between coding and analysis. I took an emic approach to coding (Gough & Scott, 2000) since I am an educator who participated in the culture I was studying. After the data collection, I summarized themes, perceptions, and perspectives and used empirical coding. This allowed me to identify key points of the data, categorize similarities, and aided in developing a theory of explanation (Raeder, 2007). A peer researcher, for the purpose of reliability, completed blinded coding. The qualitative strategy of inductive analysis was used to examine the data for emerging patterns, categories, and themes (Patton, 1980). This allowed an indigenous typology, which illuminated the process and outcomes (Patton, 1980) of teachers in

the role as gatekeepers in United States History classes. For the analysis, I primarily used the recommendations of Patton (1980), but also incorporated some of the guidelines of Hatch (2002).

1. Data analysis would begin during the interview process. I was cognizant of teachers' responses and surrounding environment (Hatch, 2002).
2. Patterns, categories, and themes that reflected the relationships found in the data, which included interviews and materials collected, was established and distinguished from one another (Patton, 1980).
3. After patterns, categories, and themes were identified (Patton, 1980), the perceived teachers' stances easily and clearly fit into one of the four stances, which were Exclusive Neutrality, Exclusive Partiality, Neutral Impartiality, or Committed Impartiality as identified by Washington and Humphries (2011).
4. The data was read multiple times to find examples to either support or repudiate the findings from the literature review (Hatch, 2002).

In an effort to maintain my research integrity, as recommended by Creswell and Millar (2000), I retained records of activities during the research, which included, but were not limited to, correspondence, research journals, data collected, and analyses.

In summary, after I conducted research that was contextual and flexible, I critically reflected on the data I collected. I followed Hatch's (2002) data analysis model and read the data numerous times, coded the information a minimum of three times, and developed categories. From the coding I connected categories to place, experience, and standards as well as to the four stances defined by Washington and Humphries (2011). I then identified how these stances translated into classroom practices. Categories were examined within each participant's interview and compared to all the participants' interviews. Like other qualitative researchers, I

reflected on the data, made critical assessments of the participants' interviews, and attempted to explain what I captured from the data (Mason, 2002). My goal was to identify factors teachers deemed influential in creating controversial issues as well as factors that influenced their incorporation of such topics into standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. Additionally, I examined the participants' perspectives in teaching these issues to "explain social phenomena in order to solve 'the intellectual puzzle'" (Carcary, 2009).

Importance of Study

The issues individuals could deem controversial are infinite. My review of literature revealed the discussion of race relations, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 came to the forefront as the most controversial issues in history and social science classrooms today. I suspected there was a gap between what was identified as controversial issues in scholarly literature and what secondary level United States History teachers perceived controversial in the standards they are required to teach. I also wanted to know what challenges teachers faced when broaching controversial issues in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. I focused on secondary level United States History teachers because the mandated standards emphasized intellectual skills for citizenship, which according to Hess (2009) can be developed through the incorporation of controversial issues

This research allowed teachers' voices to be heard and showed that teachers' decisions were based on their values, beliefs, and prior experiences. It was also important to understand each teacher's stance when faced with controversial issues. As a classroom gatekeeper, teachers had the power to cultivate discussion of controversial issues or allowed them to remain fallow and this research revealed which path teachers chose. If teachers chose to incorporate controversial issues into their classroom, then this research revealed the utility of doing so in a

21st century standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. Research indicated teachers who embraced controversial topics in their classrooms gave students the opportunity to learn the art of discussion, debate, compromise, and become more civic-minded individuals (Hess, 2009).

Oulton et al. (2004) claimed that in order to create these classroom environments teachers needed to feel less constrained in their ability to teach (Oulton et al., 2004).

Barton and McCully (2007) found incorporation of controversial issues into classrooms had the ability to create positive outcomes and prepared students to live in a democratic society if they were encouraged to explore, discussed opposing perspectives, and expressed their own views. Hess (2009) asserts that controversial issues develop students into civic-minded individuals for participation in a democracy. In the Virginia and United States History SOLs, the Commonwealth of Virginia emphasized “intellectual skills required for responsible citizenship” (Virginia Department of Education, 2008). Therefore, United States History teachers played an integral role in preparing students to live in our democratic society by helping them learn skills to discuss, debate, understand differing points of view, and learn the art of compromise and tolerance for others.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of controversial issues in secondary level United States History classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Using research findings from twelve secondary level United States History teachers, this work was ascribed by the question:

- What factors shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues in their teaching of United States History in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

In order to answer the above question, it must first be understood:

- What factors do secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating the controversy attached to an issue discussed in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

Defining Controversial Issues

Scholars have defined controversial issues as topics:

- with multiple points of view (Barton & McCully, 2007; NCSS, 2012b)
- consisting of competing answers that are not settled (Hess, 2009)
- having the potential to cause a division within a society (Philpott et al., 2011)
- whereby location and audience can determine the degree of controversy (Washington & Humphries, 2011)

When asked to provide their own definition of a controversial issue, the majority of the twelve participants stated it included competing multiple points of view with the potential to incite a division among a small group of individuals or society, all of which were influenced by

preconceived notions as a result of the region where they resided. All participants found the audience determined the level of controversy attached to an issue, and most believed controversy could be fueled by the focus the media placed on an issue. All of the twelve participants in this study defined, in their own words, controversial issues similarly to the definitions of the scholars. The participants in this research found, just as the aforementioned scholars, location influenced the audience, which determined the magnitude of controversy encompassing an issue. Audience and location also influenced the participants' comfort level when they approached controversial issues in a standards-based, high-stakes tested classroom. Students were the primary audience for the participants, but parents and administrators were included within the assemblage of consideration when teachers broached controversial issues. The participants contended students were influenced by current events whether it was direct exposure to the media or by their parents' opinions on topics in the news. Therefore, the roles of audience, location, and media were examined to determine their influence in standards-based, high-stakes tested classrooms in the State of Virginia.

Influential Factors that Create Controversy

When asked which factors were found to be influential in creating the controversy attached to issues discussed in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms, Alice stated anything in the standards had the potential to create controversy that:

goes against an established social or cultural norm. For our kids things are controversial if they [students] have never heard the other side of the issue. If you teach about exploration it is not . . . they are shocked if Columbus is talked about as a murderer and how he decimates the [Native American] population and how if they do not find enough gold they [Columbus' men] chop their heads off and how

he used them [Native Americans] as slaves. So I try to bring in some controversy there to teach them the different points of view and bias in historiography and so one day for them to realize ‘ah, maybe I have gotten a watered-down version in history’ and I tell them to question every source.

Alice taught at Red River High School in Burch County and found in her small, rural community many students had only heard one point of view of issues. Therefore, if another perspective was given, it went against students’ prior beliefs instilled in them by their family and community which resulted in controversy. Alice particularly found religion caused controversy because of her geographic location. Alice’s school was located in an area she defined as a strong “Southern Baptist community” where a plethora of churches were located in a small community. Since religion was very important in the area where she taught, Alice found controversy arose whenever she linked Catholicism to the Age of Discovery. She attributed this to the predominant Baptist beliefs of the students who lived in the community.

Alice claimed she had the power to make any of the standards controversial—or not. She complained that the bureaucrats who were responsible for developing the standards were focused on political correctness. Alice contended she deviated from the standards and incorporated information to challenge her students to “possibly challenge their beliefs.” According to Alice, she could teach the Age of Exploration in a noncontroversial manner, but it always became controversial when she discussed Columbus as a murderer who “decimated the Native American population” as well as the “enslavement and atrocities the natives faced in order to amass gold.” Her students indicated they had never heard the “realistic” portrayal of Columbus and Alice stated she could have continued with a “watered-down version of history,” but she pushed students to question every source. Elizabeth stated she supported Alice’s methods in their co-

taught classes, but it was not something that could be done in her special education classes. Elizabeth did not believe those students could handle the discussions, though she regularly incorporated current events into her classes. In an effort to connect today's issues to the past, Alice stated she incorporated current events into her classes and attempted to identify the "role of the media and bias" in events that occurred in the world.

Jerry believed he and Alice taught similarly and he, too, liked to challenge his students. Jerry, Alice, and Elizabeth taught close to a major Civil War site and due to this, Jerry perceived race relations were controversial with his students. Jerry attributed his students' geographic location to their enhanced interest in the Civil War over race relations. Jerry was intrigued that the pacing guide Burch County Schools provided for their teachers devoted over three weeks to the Civil War, which was substantially greater than most other topics in the curriculum. Jerry assumed this was due to the school's location.

Twenty minutes away from Red River High School, Neal also taught 11th grade in Burch County, but at Spencer Heights School. Like Alice, Neal perceived anything within the standards had the potential to be controversial. Neal found the way he approached issues within the context of his classroom determined the level of controversy and he stated he chose the more controversial route because it gave him the ability "to shake things up." Though his teaching techniques were not observed, Neal claimed he exposed his students to multiple points of view, which he asserted had the potential to create controversy. For example, Neal found slight controversy arose if women's rights were discussed in his classroom. He particularly enjoyed the discussion of women's rights since, as the father of two adult daughters; he believed they should have the same rights as any man. Since this topic was not an issue that was settled, Neal stated it created a slight division within his classroom between the sexes, although not to the

extent he would have expected. Neal firmly stated the way issues were viewed was dependent on the audience and their location.

Sharon taught 6th grade at Spencer Heights School and found, just as Neal had in 11th grade, issues were controversial due to their geographic location. She defined controversial issues as topics emotionally charged with many different opinions. Sharon deemed the Holocaust and race relations controversial in her 6th grade classroom—if she was not careful how they were approached. Sharon admitted she attempted to be very cautious in the way she taught so she would not upset parents or administrators. Lisa, also a 6th grade teacher, taught in Dade County and similarly to Sharon, she attempted to avoid attracting the attention of parents or administrators. Lisa considered a controversial issue “anything a parent would have a problem with me discussing it in class.”

The participants who attempted to avoid unwanted attention were not limited to these two middle school participants. Ben, who taught 11th grade Virginia and United States History, stated during his interview that he completely avoided teaching controversial issues to avoid having attention drawn to him. He defined controversial issues as topics with multiple points of view that caused heated discussions, which had the potential to result in his termination. Therefore, he alleged he taught strictly from the standards because he did not want to be contacted by parents or administrators if he discussed something in his classroom deemed inappropriate. Of all the interviews conducted, Ben was the only high school participant who took this stance and avoided issues not found in the approved curriculum and refused to allow controversial discussions in his classroom.

Simon and Mark taught 11th grade Virginia and United States History in the same Dade County school as Ben. Simon contended issues were controversial if they challenged beliefs

formed by students' geographic location. He also used controversial issues as an avenue when "he engaged students in critical analysis." Simon stated he wanted his "students to question rather than accept facts" and in order to do this, he cited the use of current events into lessons as essential, which at times had caused controversy to arise in his classroom. Simon was willing to do this because he found these "were teachable moments his students would remember." Mark found controversial issues had the potential to create divisions in society. Just as Neal and Alice had claimed, Mark believed he had the potential to make issues as controversial as he chose and he did not avoid them.

According to the aforementioned scholars' definitions as well as the participants' perceptions in this study the controversy of issues were dependent upon audience, who were influenced by *place*. Place described the human characteristics of a location and individuals could be influenced by their location (specifically the regions where they live). The region where individuals lived, in turn, contributed to preconceived notions that developed opinions and ideologies. Additionally, the role of the media and their focus on particular topics possibly contributed to an issue becoming controversial in the public sphere and the classroom when current events were incorporated into lessons. There was a consensus among the participants on how they defined controversial issues and in an effort to answer the aforementioned questions these factors were condensed into the categories of place, preconceived notions, and the media.

Place. The National Council for Geographic Education developed one of the five themes of geography as place, which described human characteristics of a location. Another theme, region, was identified by cultural and physical characteristics. In a domino effect, physical characteristics influenced the human and cultural characteristics, which developed the ideologies that emerged in a community or society. Influential factors in regions were religion, education,

economic opportunities, customs, and ways individuals developed their lens on topics, which had the potential to cause controversy. All of this formed *place*, which for the purpose of this research was used interchangeably with *location*.

Neal's frustration was evident when he spoke about his students' lackadaisical attitude toward their education, and he blamed this on their demographics. "If they don't get it at home then I can't do it all here [classroom]." A minority of the parents in the community where Neal taught attended college and the community predominantly consisted of individuals who were reared in the small town. Some may have gone to a nearby community college, but Neal indicated a high school diploma was the highest degree for most of his students' parents and many were high school dropouts. These parents had worked in local factories since they attended high school and Neal contended most "kids will do the same thing their parents did." Neal blamed students' lack of ambition on the parents who did not value education so its importance was not instilled in his students. "They [students] just go through the motions and wait to graduate—if they do." Neal's students had problems with truancy and lacked participation in school. He no longer gave homework because "they won't do it, they just don't do it. I tell you it goes back to what they get or don't get at home."

Neal found the way issues were approached with particular groups of students in his classroom determined the controversy. He suggested if students were from communities of more educated professionals, their mindset would likely be different than what he found in the community where he taught. Neal complained whenever he attempted to incorporate controversial issues into his classroom, most often his students inappropriately laughed by what he discerned as their immaturity and lack of interest about the issue. One particular lesson Neal reflected on was a comparison of Nazi and Confederate flags. He reflected that when he

displayed the Confederate flag, giggles erupted in the room from both white and black students, followed by a “lecture on their lack of maturity.” During the interview, with a raised voice as he waved his hands in the air, Neal vividly expressed his frustration and blamed his students’ responses to their lack of interest in events outside of their community. He attributed all of this to the students’ lack of travel and life experiences, which had been restricted within the confines of their small community due to their parents’ “cultural experience and financial ability to travel.” Neal viewed the Northern Virginia area as one with well-educated, professional parents who provided a different environment for students. In that “more culturally rich region,” Neal suggested there were “a different caliber of students with more developed attitudes” about controversial issues where there were classroom discussions of multiple perspectives in a mature manner, unlike what he shared he had experienced in his school. Neal reflected students did not show this disinterest earlier in his teaching career and each year it has gotten worse. Due to his frustration, Neal decreased the discussion of controversial issues in his classes and only “give [sic] them what they need to know to pass the test. I would love to talk about things and have great discussions, but you just can’t do it here—they won’t talk!”

Like Neal, Alice asserted she could make any issue controversial, including the Commonwealth of Virginia’s standards. Alice found students were intrigued by the personalities of people they studied in her Virginia and United States History class. For instance, she not only discussed Jefferson as a founding father, but as a man who “had temper tantrums and openly hated a lot of his contemporaries. That is what they are interested in.” Alice wanted her students to understand people who were idolized in history were actually real people who “had flaws and were human.” She “incorporated controversial issues because of the edge it brings.” During the focus group interview, Alice and Jerry connected the community and family

as responsible for the instilled mindsets of the students, which they attributed to the students' reactions to controversial topics, such as the 2008 presidential election. Alice's shared her students' responses during the 2008 election when they told her if they were of voting age "they would not vote for Obama because he is black. No filter. I think Virginia's response to racial tension is scandalous." Alice reflected less than twenty years ago the community held a Homecoming parade and members of the Ku Klux Klan participated. "A lot of my kids hear what their parents say. I wish they [parents] knew how much they indoctrinate their children."

During a focus group session, Jerry agreed with Alice regarding the challenges they faced because of the community where they lived. "We are so homogeneous compared to schools around us." Jerry added his students were clear about their feelings after the 2008 election when they openly shared in class "I can't believe we voted for a black guy." When pushed to justify their feelings, students could not support their beliefs other than "oh, I just don't like him because he is black." Both participants found issues became controversial when they went against an individual's social or cultural norm. When Jerry's students spoke against President Obama, the typical responses heard were "my dad says this, my mom says this" and Jerry responded, "there is nothing I can do about that." These teachers found students became defensive when their single point of view was challenged. Due to the school's close proximity to a Civil War site, Alice and Jerry concurred their location played a role in the level of controversy attached to certain issues discussed in their classrooms, which included the Civil War and slavery.

The school was not diverse and both participants observed the majority of students took pride in what Alice labeled as "their self-proclaimed title of good 'ole boys" and Jerry added, the students "were proud of their heritage." These two participants claimed this attested to which

issues became controversial in their classrooms. When the Civil War was studied, Jerry noted his students attached more controversy to the North's infringement on the South rather than the treatment of enslaved individuals. He believed the students perceived the North came to the South and took "away the South's way of life" and Jerry's students viewed immigration with the same lens.

In regards to immigration, Jerry's students were territorial and believed the United States "should have shut the border and not let immigrants in." He challenged the students' point of view since "everyone in here was an immigrant at some point. Apparently you [students] hate yourself." Jerry vented his frustration with his students and questioned "the point in arguing it." Again, Jerry indicated his students' views on immigration resonated with the way they perceived the Northerners infringed on the South. Jerry shared his teaching experiences with his family in New Jersey, who found students' reactions in Virginia interesting and quite different from their New Jersey students. Jerry discerned that students' reactions to the topics of slavery and immigration in New Jersey versus those in Virginia were much different and he attributed this as a byproduct of the region. Jerry also found it interesting his school district dedicated approximately three weeks for Civil War studies in the pacing guide, whereas the New Jersey teachers he knew spent less than three days on the same topic. Jerry asserted this was indicative of "the value our region placed on the Civil War compared to schools in the North" and served as an example of the difference one's location made.

Spencer Heights High School, where Neal taught, was more racially diverse than Red River High School and there was a minimal amount of Alice's labeled "good ole boys" attitude. All three of these participants indicated if they taught in a different region, their students would respond differently in the classroom. Alice was astounded when she learned most of her students

had never traveled “out of the State of Virginia and when you talk to them about worldly things, Middle Eastern affairs or world issues they have no idea, you know, they aren’t open-minded because they don’t have a clue.” Jerry added, “It is hard for them to wrap their heads around it.” Alice found “race is big” and attributed the students’ perceptions influenced their school and community. “We are not racially diverse, we are not a diverse school at all” and Jerry accentuated “in any way.” Alice and Jerry were reared in the area where they taught and Jerry was concerned he sounded as though he was “criticizing the area I grew up in,” but wanted to vocalize observations made in his classroom and his concerns for students’ inability to view issues through an unbiased lens.

All of the participants in this study indicated locality influenced students who then came into their classrooms with preconceived notions about most of the issues discussed. Therefore, it was dependent on place of the type of mindset students developed before they entered the classroom setting. In turn, their mindset served as a factor that influenced how controversial issues were defined in a standards-based, high-stakes tested classroom.

Preconceived notions. The participants in this study found students entered their classrooms with developed opinions (preconceived notions) about topics before they examined various perspectives provided to them in the classroom. Participants asserted issues became controversial in their classrooms and conflicts arose when various points of view were discussed that were contrary to students’ preconceived notions. The majority of the participants attributed the community or family for development of their students’ preconceived ideas. Therefore, it was inevitable that some issues students were exposed to in the classroom went against their established social or cultural norm. As a result, issues had the potential to be controversial due

to the students' preconceived notions being challenged, which was possibly due to a lack of exposure to other individuals' points of view.

Approximately 100 miles from Burch County, Conrad taught at Griffith Middle School in Dade County. Conrad found his 7th grade students were not informed about many of the issues debated during the 2012 presidential election, but comments they shared with him indicated they believed the government was going to confiscate their guns if President Obama was reelected. This is an area where most families were avid hunters and Conrad's students indicated to him they could not fathom why there should be a restriction on guns, regardless of the issues in the country at the time, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. It was evident to Conrad that his students did not understand the workings of our democracy and he shared that classroom instruction time was used to reassure them President Obama would not show up at their home and take their guns. He noted there were "a lot of misconceptions. The president has all power, and the president is going to change this law." However, he perceived what was voiced in his classroom was echoed from students' parents and within the community. Therefore, if this topic was broached in his classroom, controversy arose as a result of the "students' singular view regarding gun control." Conrad did not believe his students exhibited racial negativity during the 2012 presidential election because they were more concerned about gun control. During the 2008 presidential election Conrad heard accusations of Obama's "Muslim, middle-eastern" connections, but indicated these were not voiced in 2012. Since the majority of the students' families were "avid hunters," Conrad perceived there was more concern over guns than skin color in his classes during the past election.

Conrad contended that he did not avoid controversial issues and shared his approach was "a little bold, more bold because I haven't gotten any harsh feedback or any complaints."

Additionally, he believed there was “probably some numbing of society due to what they [students] are exposed to.” He knew his students were exposed to graphically violent video games and movies and Conrad was unsure if there was any “image that would have the impact they did 30 years ago” on students.

Lisa taught 6th grade in the same county as Conrad, but in a different school. During the presidential election, Lisa stated her 6th grade students were “little parrots of their parents.” After the 2008 presidential election, Lisa shared that a student walked into her room and announced it was the “worse day in his life.” Lisa did not address the comment because she understood what his words reflected, “because I am from here and I know his family. I know their values, I know for a fact that one of his uncles is in the Ku Klux Klan.” It was “within the past 10 years they [Ku Klux Klan] marched in their town” where the school was located. Lisa found it “shocking how rampant racism still is.” In addition to racial concerns, students also wanted to maintain their rights to bear arms and during the 2012 presidential election, Lisa stated students blurted out “Obama is trying to take away our guns.” Lisa chose not discuss other perspectives as Conrad had done. Instead, she would “gloss over it and move on.” Therefore, she avoided controversy attached to the issue because parents “might get upset and call the school” and Lisa wanted to avoid this.

In Burch County, Sharon’s 6th grade students caused the issue of gun control to become emotionally charged after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre. Sharon was a self-proclaimed “news junkie” and “gun laws were in the news and there was a lot of discussion in class about this.” Although the Second Amendment was not part of her curriculum, Sharon discussed the issue because “students wanted to and needed to discuss this.” Sharon felt the discussion was important because “some of the students get wrong information from their

parents and they spout that in class.” In her community, which is located in Burch County where Neal taught, Sharon perceived students were accustomed to only hearing one perspective on issues, which was within their home environment. She asserted many of her students’ parents were “very right-winged” and students “repeated things verbatim that their parents say.” Just as Conrad and Lisa found gun control was a concern for their students, Sharon indicated the same was true in her classroom. Some of Sharon’s students voiced their concerns to her that someone would come into their school just as was done at Sandy Hook Elementary School while others feared, like Conrad’s students, their families would no longer be able to hunt. During the interview, Sharon shared that she chose to discuss the Sandy Hook tragedy and then gun control in depth because she believed this gave students another point of view on gun control they had not been exposed to at home. Sharon, like Lisa, indicated she did not want to face repercussions from parents or administrators regarding issues discussed in class. Sharon added she was careful when she discussed issues that were controversial, because “it takes a lot of finesse to fix the misconceptions that they [students] hear, without hearing back from their parents.” Sharon felt she had been successful because there were not any complaints because she had attempted “to avoid making parents mad.” Sharon said she viewed her ideas as “a little left of center compared to the community” where she taught and did not want to deal with administrators or parents with issues because “I am not a good debater so I do not like that kind of confrontation.”

All of the participants found political and racial topics had the potential to become controversial in their classrooms because the varying opinions had the potential to trigger disagreements during discussions. The impetus for these particular topics included students’ preconceived notions instilled by family, the media, images shown in the classroom, and classroom discussions. Emily taught 6th grade in Burch County and stated she showed her

students “graphic images of slaves.” She also shared that she discussed race relations in her lessons, but the primary catalyst Emily identified that evoked controversy in her classroom was information her students received from parents and grandparents. She indicated that in the past, discussion segued into a place where students shared the opinions of what she believed was voiced within their families. Emily discerned the older generations’ words in her students’ voices because “some white students have learned from their families that Whites are superior to Blacks.” Though it was not blatantly voiced in her classroom, Emily heard whispers and giggles and she dealt with each individual student who displayed an inappropriate response to discussions on race.

The grandparents of one of Emily’s students owned a restaurant in their small community and Emily’s own family shared with her that after desegregation it was not a secret that Blacks were not wanted in that restaurant. “These family members lived this way in the 1950s and parents have passed this message down.” Though it was illegal for the entrepreneurs to deny Blacks service after desegregation, during the interview Emily revealed a lens into this family’s attitude and shared “there was a silent code that caused Blacks to avoid this establishment.” Emily witnessed this family’s biases and racism in their grandchildren she taught, which she found led to controversy in her classroom when she attempted to evoke open-mindedness through discussion of multiple points of view using the topic of race relations. Emily had to establish a classroom rule whereby students “are not allowed to talk about not liking the president because he is part African American” in an effort to avoid inappropriate remarks or reactions from some of her students.

Regardless of students’ preconceived notions, most participants postulated they discussed multiple points of view to build skills of critical analysis and citizenship. Alice stated it is a

regular practice for her to incorporate multiple points of view in her classroom. She stated, “They want to know. They ask if this is the real story or the unbiased story. They start to look at it after a while.” Conrad was not sure of his impact with students, but it has not deterred him because he has continued to incorporate multiple perspectives.

I want them [students] to like coming to a good place—school. They can get good information. If they could see school as a place and actually have enough foresight that when I am done with this, I will be more prepared to behave, act, do my duties and responsibilities in society. That is the big picture I want to show them.

Simon asserted he always provided multiple points of views for his students because

one of the biggest things is citizenship and is one of the nebulous goals of the Department of Education that we want to make our students civic-minded and active in the United States. The idea is to get them talking and questioning. One of the most important things in my class is to understand why. I am very open with any opinion, but you have to know why you have it. That is part of the civic-mindedness. It is not acknowledging there is one way to look at the world because there are many ways. There are many perspectives and you [student] may be in a discussion of a perspective you do not agree with.

Several participants suggested teachers could not be expected to change the mindset of students who had been told a particular perspective by people they had trusted all of their lives. However, several participants asserted if students were exposed to different perspectives they

could develop into civic-minded individuals who would listen to the points of view of others before they took a stance on an issue. The majority of participants in the research indicated they did not avoid controversial issues because in addition to covering the standards, they also wanted to promote student growth by exposing them to multiple points of view in order to promote open-mindedness. Whether the participants were willing to discuss political or racial issues or not, they found the students' preconceived notions were factors that led to controversy when these issues were discussed within the realm of their classrooms.

Role of the Media. When defining controversial issues, participants indicated that students were influenced by the focus the media placed on topics. They related this was a primary influence whereby the students received the information from the media or secondary where other individuals shared information from the media. Simon wanted to make his teaching relevant, and to do this he attempted “to bring in the news as much as possible.” He also “encouraged students to be aware of current events” by watching the news on television. By doing so, Simon thought it “helped the bigger picture be more profound. They [students] see that it is still relevant today. It is not I do it like in a civics class on specific days, but in lectures to try to bring in as much as I can.”

With her 6th grade students, Sharon wanted to “draw similarities between current events and what we are discussing in class when it is appropriate.” As previously mentioned, immediately after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, Sharon found her students asked to discuss the tragedy because they were concerned about what they had seen on television and been told by their parents. Some students “wanted to be reassured they were safe in school,” but Sharon shared the locus of the discussions were regarding gun control. Just as students wanted

to be reassured they would be safe in school, others wanted to feel secure guns would not be removed from their homes.

Simon and Sharon gave examples of ways the media caused issues to become more controversial for the general public and ultimately trickled into their classrooms; however, other participants found even with the media's power to influence the controversy attached to an issue, the media did not particularly influence students. Ben stated his students did not stay up-to-date on issues and "half don't know what is going on in the news." In his AP United States History class, he found students were so focused on their homework they did not have time to watch the news. Ben believed his students were shielded from the "real world" and they did not think what happened in the news had a real influence on their lives. Mark found students "are not tuned in to mainstream media as they used to be." He perceived the media as a secondary source of influence of controversy for issues and the primary contributing factor were from the students' home and community.

Neal vented frustration over his students' lack of interest in current events. He indicated students might listen to "two minute sound bites" of news, but it was impossible for them to understand an event in that short amount of time. He attributed his students' lack of enthusiasm to their unwillingness to pursue more information regarding current events as a result of the example set by their parents. There was only so much that could be done in the classroom according to Neal and if it was not modeled at home, then students did not understand the importance of it in their own lives. Therefore, like most participants, Neal understood the potential power the media had to make issues more controversial, but he did not perceive it translated into the classroom since students had demonstrated they were not willing to watch or read about current events. Though Neal believed students were "oblivious to what was discussed

in the media,” he did mention current events regarding “things that were relevant” to the standards they covered in class. He wanted them to be aware of what was happening in the world, but added, “I can’t go home and hold their [students] hands and make them read the newspaper or watch the news. They don’t see the relevance to it. They are all connected to their phone.”

Other participants’ observations regarding the effect of the media somewhat differed from Neal’s experiences of parental influence with current events. While Neal was frustrated with his students’ apathy and lack of knowledge of world events, Lisa and Sharon found their students basically mimicked what their parents said. These participants implied the media did influence the parents of students, but not the students unless it was a horrific event, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy. Lisa and Sharon found students feared a similar event had the potential to “happen in their school,” The point of convergence for Sharon’s and Conrad’s students was the fear guns would be taken away by President Obama after the 2012 election. Sharon and Conrad both attributed these concerns to parental influence rather than from the media.

From the participants’ observations, the media influenced controversy within the classroom if it was a catastrophic event, such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy. Middle school participants indicated circumstances such as this garnered students’ attention, but it was apparent much of their information was from a secondary source, such as parents. As information trickled into the classrooms, the participants found students misconstrued information they had to clarify. There were participants who attempted to incorporate current events into their lessons, but due to perceived time constraints and a lack of interest from students, current events were not discussed on a regular basis, if at all. High school participants

indicated students were not willing to stay abreast of current events in any form. Therefore, the participants perceived the media would be more influential in the middle school setting as a factor to create controversy than in a high school environment.

Factors that Shaped Discussion of Controversial Issues

After the factors were identified that served as catalysts for controversies within the classroom, it needed to be understood which factors shaped secondary level United States History teachers' *willingness* to introduce these topics into a standards-based, high stakes tested classroom. The most influential factors that caused issues to be controversial were place, preconceived notions, and the media. Within the context of the classroom, *place*, *experiences*, and the *standards* shaped the participants' willingness to discuss controversial issues within the context of their classrooms.

When teachers defined controversial issues within the context of their classrooms that shaped discussion, a significant factor was *place*. Students entered classrooms with preconceived notions based on their geographic location and were influenced by their family or community. Therefore, the majority of the participants found students' preconceived notions also influenced how they defined controversial issues. Ben stated he felt he "played the conservative advocate" with his students because "three-fourths or more of the students have liberal beliefs because their parents have liberal beliefs." Emily stated she taught in a town where racism was evident, but she taught in an effort to attempt to change her students' views.

I am not naïve enough to think I am changing opinions the students are getting outside of my classroom. I would like for them to take away toleration and respect for people that are different than us. I just do not want the same cycle of uninformed prejudices to continue.

Therefore, place was one of three factors that shaped teachers' discussion of controversial issues in their classroom setting.

A second factor that influenced teachers' decisions to incorporate controversial issues was *experience* (of teachers and students). Experience influenced the classroom environment and interactions in the classroom community. This included, but was not limited to, teaching experience, whether it was the total number years a participant had taught or years teaching a particular course. Experience also included classroom teachers' points of view on issues as well as experiences that developed the students' perspectives. This resulted in overlapping factors of place and experience that influenced participants' willingness to discuss multiple points of view and whether personal perspectives were shared by teachers or students. If controversial issues were discussed in the classroom, there was a risk of repercussions from students, parents, other teachers, or administrators. This could be caused by dialog in a classroom, comments that caused discomfort, or words that were misconstrued. Hess (2009) contended skills of critical analysis incorporated into classrooms created civic-minded individuals. Due to the content discussed within an academic year, United States History classrooms had the potential to be excellent venues for promoting citizenship. Although the participants had an optimal setting to promote citizenship, many did not seize this opportunity as a result of their teaching experiences or interactions with parents and others in the academic arena. After negative experiences with a parent who was also an administrator, Lisa altered her incorporation of controversial issues. Admittedly, when promoting civic-mindedness in students, she stated, "I don't know that I do enough. When we are talking about events in history and to bring them to the present, I probably don't do good at that." Sharon shared she wanted to teach her students to be good citizens, but was under a great deal of stress teaching a new course and she just needed "to get through all of

the material.” She was not comfortable teaching history after many years of being a math teacher and distrusted her administrators. Additionally, many of her students’ parents were very “right-winged” and though she stated she made an attempt to create civic-minded students, Sharon was careful because she did not want “make her parents mad because administration would not support her.”

The final factor that influenced participants to discuss controversial issues in their classrooms were the required *standards* taught in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Factors that influenced how teachers covered the standards included their content knowledge, perception of the time required to cover the content, available resources, and the end of course test. The importance of content knowledge and time were concerns for participants when decisions were made to incorporate controversial issues into their lessons. The two factors varied in the way participants covered the required content and the types of resources they used. This evolved into issues of images and language found in primary resources and whether teachers used content related, but racially offensive language. Additionally, it varied how participants utilized their district-approved textbooks. All of the secondary level United States History participants’ students were required to take the SOL test at the end of the academic year, which caused stress for many of the participants. As one who avoided controversial issues, Ben asserted he did not “have time to cover issues that would could come up next year in government class.” At the time of this research, most Americans were entangled in dialogue regarding same-sex marriage and Ben said he would not discuss this in class. “Same-sex marriage, I just never. We haven’t. We are hardly ever to that point and it is the end of the year.” Ben reiterated his time constraints to teach beyond the standards and believed “the SOLs are everything about teaching now. It is

your script. Teachers are being held more accountable to the SOLs. I need to think about my job too.”

Place. A factor that influenced how teachers defined controversial issues within the confines of their classroom was place. Although it may be perceived as redundant to discuss place as both defining an issue of controversy and as a factor that shaped discussion of controversial issues, its salience warrants it be addressed in both questions. When examining place as a factor for discussing controversial issues, geographic location and preconceived notions contributed to the mindset of individuals. Our existence in the 21st century is influenced by place (Cresswell, 2008), so there was a blurred line between location and preconceived notions since one was dependent on the other. Therefore, the two will be combined under the results of the importance of place in factors that determined the participants’ willingness to discuss controversial issues in their classrooms.

Geographic location and preconceived notions. The majority of participants from Burch County indicated their students’ reactions were a result of their demographics. Alice, Jerry, Elizabeth, Neal, and Emily, who taught in Burch County, stated it was evident students were influenced by their surroundings when they discussed race. They attributed their students’ racist views to their close geographic location to Civil War sites and the fact it was not unusual to see Confederate paraphernalia displayed throughout the community or on the person of its citizens.

Both Jerry and Alice noted racism was especially evident in their classes after the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Jerry stated that without hesitation a student in his class stated, “I can’t believe we voted for a black guy.” When questioned, Jerry found his students did not know anything about Obama’s policies and their opinions were based solely on his skin color. Jerry’s students admitted they had not kept abreast of the election and what they knew was

hearsay. Both of these participants stated they expected racist comments the day after the election and for that reason Alice altered her class opener that day. Alice displayed questions (See Figure 1) on a document reader for the students' response, but feared the responses she would receive.

I would not let them talk about it because I thought the word Nigger¹ was going to come out . . . We are in a place where the Civil War has not ended. I kept their responses and I will keep them forever . . . I was so sad that day. I thought, this is so sad, so eye-opening.

There were only two Blacks and one Hispanic among Alice's predominantly white students. Therefore, she did not discuss the responses, but collected the papers and read them later. She found her students believed the election would "result in the Apocalypse" because they viewed Obama's beliefs went against their Christian doctrine. The majority of the responses contained racist comments although the N-word was not used. There were predictions of racial wars, "colored folks will have more rights," and "morals had been erased" (See Figure 2). Students also voiced the country was being handed over to a black man who was not a natural born American citizen, was Muslim, and he would lead our country into an abyss of moral decay.

Jerry did not use Alice's activity with his students, but both participants attributed the way students reacted to the election were due to the school's geographic location, preconceived notions instilled by families, and lack of diversity. After both participants examined the students' responses, they concurred the reactions were a result of what students heard at home and they simply verbalized their parents' beliefs.

¹ Due to the repugnancy of this word, N-Word will be used in lieu of the actual word unless it is in a direct quote

The students' responses created a challenge for Alice and Jerry, but both continued to discuss controversial issues in their classrooms in hopes their students would become more open-minded. Both participants claimed they discussed practically any topic in their classrooms, but Alice was still apprehensive about possible racial slurs aimed toward the president. She had planned accordingly for responses to President Obama's reelection, but her experience provided evidence that teachers needed to always be ready since controversy cannot always be planned and can occur when least expected. Lisa did not discuss controversial issues with her 6th grade students and told them to go home and discuss the issue with their parents whereas Jerry and Alice continued to embrace them even when Alice knew it was necessary to make special accommodations to maintain control of her classroom.

Figure 1 – Alice’s class opener

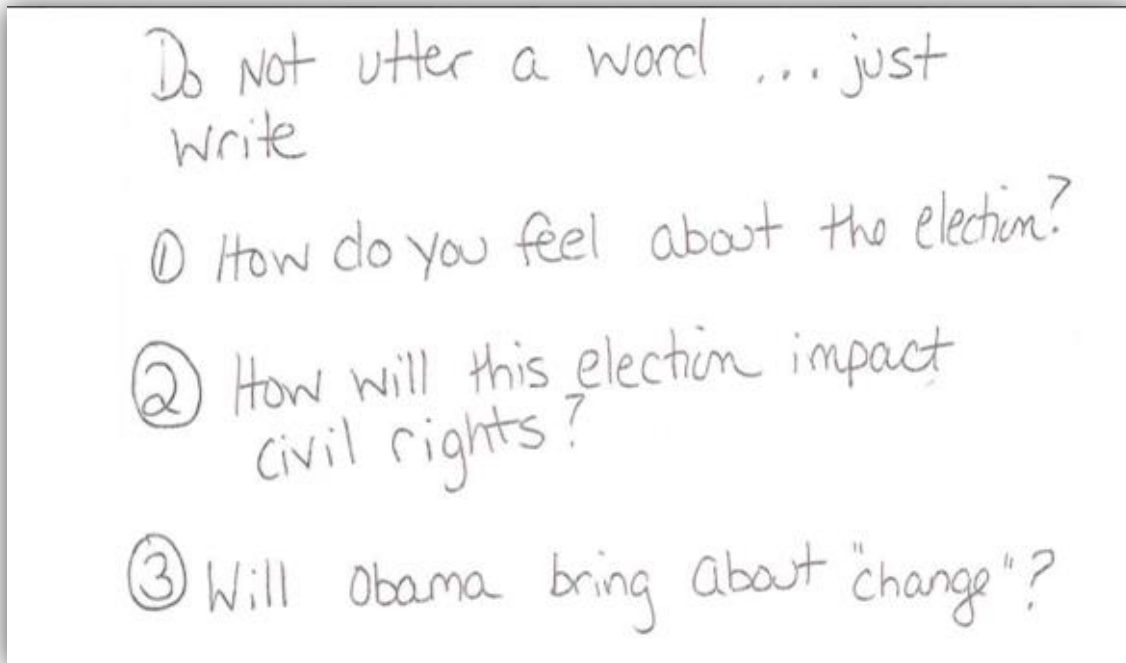
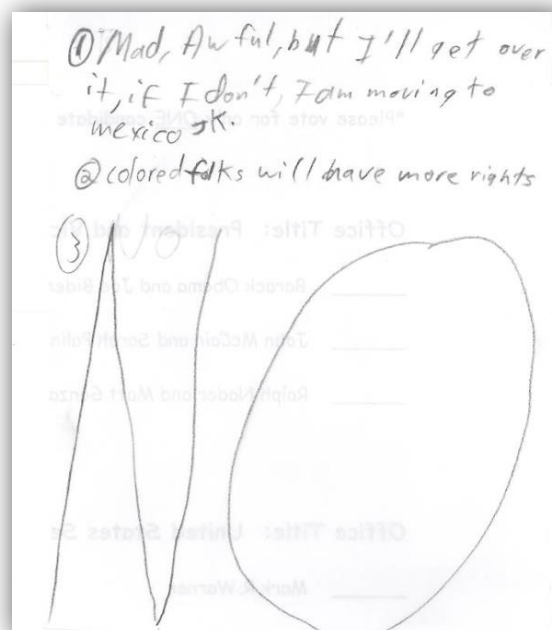
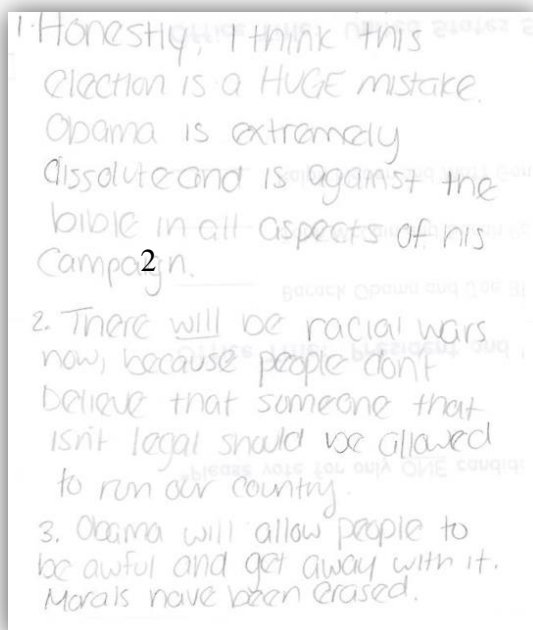


Figure 2 – Students’ responses



Neal wanted to incorporate more controversial issues into his lessons, but in the past few years his students had not responded to issues “they should be passionate about.” In addition to race relations, his students were not interested in topics such as 9/11. These students did not remember the terrorist attacks since they were only four years old at the time. Neal did not attribute their indifference to their age, but felt it was due to the fact they were geographically far removed from the epicenter of the event and did not relate it to their own lives. He asserted it would be much different to teach about 9/11 in New York or Washington, D.C. because students in rural Virginia did not understand the significance of that day. In the past ten years Neal had noticed a lack of participation from his students. He attributed this to the need to cover the standards for the high-stakes test as well as the students’ limited exposure to events outside of their small town. When Neal was in high school he believed students were more passionate and emotional about events, such as the Vietnam War. Of course, the students he knew had a connection to the war. Living close to a military base, Neal and many of his classmates had absent fathers who were in Vietnam. The students whose fathers were fighting in the war responded differently in the classroom to discussions about the war than those students who did not have a personal connection.

This past year, Neal noted a slight, brief change in his students’ views on the war in Afghanistan. Several graduates of Spencer Heights School served in the military, some whom had served in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, one of the graduates was killed in action in 2012. Prior to the burial, the streets of the town were lined with citizens and the funeral procession circled the school and the entire student body stood around the perimeter of the property as a sign of respect. The students were totally silent and appeared deep in thought though the soldier graduated from Spencer Heights School while these students were still in elementary school.

Neal was surprised and pleased with the students' homage shown to this fallen local hero, but stated they almost immediately reverted back to their lackadaisical attitude and continued to exhibit this throughout the year. Again, Neal attributed this to their demographics and lack of exposure to professionals in the community. He also blamed the students' parents for not modeling good habits for their children and once again stated he could not do it all at school "if they aren't getting it at home."

It was found that preconceived notions could be molded by exposure to one's environment. For Alice and Jerry, the racial tendencies were due to students' geographic location in close proximity to a Civil War site where the community still demonstrated pride in their southern heritage. Neal voiced his frustration over his students' passiveness in the classroom. He felt assured he would not face the same attitudes with students in a different geographic location. Neal believed his students were a product of their environment and their demeanor and perspectives on issues had been formed as byproducts of their family and community.

Experience. What individuals encountered in their lives contributed to their life experiences. These events had the potential to influence the values and beliefs of teachers and students regarding their stance on controversial issues (Washington & Humphries, 2011). Within the confines of the classroom, four factors emerged that influenced teachers' willingness to plan incorporation of controversial issues within their classroom or allow impromptu discussion if controversial issues arose: teaching experience, points of view, possible repercussions, and building skills of citizenship.

Simon indicated he was reared in a strong Catholic environment and was uncomfortable with profanity and offensive language, such as the "N-word." His family sponsored exchange

students and exposed him to various cultures and beliefs. He took what he had learned in his home and exposed his students to various perspectives in history. Even as a novice teacher, Simon stated he was confident in his teaching and discussed controversial issues with his 11th grade students during his student teaching placement in a diverse urban school. The research revealed that in addition to the teachers' points of view being considered when controversial issues were discussed, educators also considered the mindset of their students to avoid repercussions from parents or school administrators. Whether it was a novice teacher, an experienced teacher with a negative experience, or seasoned teacher who taught new content, these factors influenced whether they broached controversial issues in their standards-based, high stakes tested classrooms.

Teaching experience. All of the participants indicated as novice teachers, they were concerned with surviving their first year and closely followed the assigned curriculum. For the past few years, this had been the Virginia SOLs. Since the implementation of the SOLs, several participants indicated they elaborated very little beyond what was required to be taught. If participants had years of teaching experience and were assigned to teach a new course, they found they reverted to the same pedagogical practices as when they were novice teachers and taught strictly to the standards. This meant participants hesitated to elaborate on the required content or incorporate controversial issues until they were comfortable with their content knowledge and classroom management skills. Once they were comfortable with their classroom management skills and felt knowledgeable with their course material, then they were more likely to teach beyond the standards and incorporated contentious issues into their discussions. Even as an experienced teacher, Conrad did not incorporate controversial issues in the first year he taught United States History to 1865. He stated it was not a lack of comfort with controversial issues,

but he was “uncomfortable with some of my actual knowledge with the material.” This provided evidence that it did not matter if it was an experienced or new teacher; participants were influenced by these factors until they became comfortable with their course. Other participants found it difficult to challenge students’ belief systems with a new perspective for fear it would lead to unwanted repercussions. All of the participants understood the value of preparing students for citizenship and stated if they discussed controversial issues it built skills for citizenship, but actually teaching these skills often fell by the wayside.

Points of view. The participants agreed with Barton and McCully (2007) and the NCSS (2012b) who defined controversial issues as topics that consisted of multiple points of view that had the potential to cause a division in society (Philpott et al, 2011). Though some middle school participants were willing to share their points of view with their students, high school participants were more prone to share their personal perspectives with their classes. Jerry, Alice, and Neal often shared their points of view on issues. Neal “would get on his soapbox” and let students know how he felt about particular issues. Jerry and Alice were similar and would share their perspectives on any topic with the exception of which political party they supported or for whom they had voted. None of the middle school teachers were willing to share their own points of view with the exception of Conrad and Janet. Though neither would discuss their religious or political ideologies, Janet found it “hard to keep your personal opinion out.”

Janet was concerned about the way “we have looked at history in this county.” She found textbooks were inadequate and she wanted her students to “understand that the United States makes mistakes and we have made some pretty big mistakes and war is hell. There was the My Lai Massacre and a whole lot of women, babies, and children were slaughtered.” She recommended teachers ask themselves what students should learn about history.

There are people who believe that we should not teach history that is disparaging to our country. Well, that is a little tough. We won't have much. That is humanity. It is not like we are the bad guys alone in this world, but it is also true that we are not exceptional. There are over 7 billion people in this world. Guess what guys? We are just one of those countries. We are not exceptional.

As middle school teachers, both Janet and Conrad shared his points of view with their 7th grade students and asserted students received a realistic view of history. Conrad stated he was "more bold than most." He did this so students heard a "level-headed adult share the side of an issue" since he felt students were biased because of their preconceived notions they formed from beliefs instilled into them by family members. Multiple perspectives, as well as his own, were factors Conrad considered when presenting material to his students; however, he also stated he was careful not to equate himself with one side and eliminate the perspective of another. Conrad added he never shared his religious or political beliefs because he did not want to be perceived as part of a certain team. However, he attempted to make every effort to expose students to multiple points of view and hoped they realized there was more than one side to issues.

Simon stated he encouraged his 11th grade students in Dade County to explore perspectives and develop their individuality, but he firmly believed parents influenced their children's mindset, which evolved into positive or negative views. Simon described how he made it a point to remain neutral and never shared his own perspectives on issues though he attempted to provide multiple points of view for his students on issues they discussed. He encouraged this through discussion, debate, and hoped students realized the world was filled

with multiple perspectives and various ways issues could be approached. He did not want to minimize any perspective, which would have prevented students from reacting to something. He learned this lesson from his student teaching experience in the urban school where he taught. His classes were 95% Black and there were only three white teachers in the building. It was extremely stressful for him, especially since he taught slavery as a young white teacher from the South to predominantly black students in an urban area.

Simon was very careful how he discussed slavery and one day one of his “students called me on it.” As a native of South Carolina, he was very stressed to teach black urban students in one of Virginia’s largest cities about slavery. During a lesson on slavery, a student spoke up and stated, “All slave owners weren’t bad. Were they?” Another student added his own point of view on race relations regarding slavery when he added, “just because they took the chains off does not mean that we are equal.” Simon’s students had experienced “racial inequity” in the urban area where they lived, but regardless of their experiences, they knew not every white person was a bigot or racist. The student then questioned if Simon was “leaving stuff out.” Simon admittedly marginalized events, but instead of giving various perspectives on slavery, he “was going too far in the other direction” and “focusing on looking at Deep South plantation owners and the horrible things they were doing to slaves. It was like I wanted to be sensitive to my students.” During his lessons, Simon found he had limited his perspectives to the slaves who were treated harshly by their owners. Simon stated he realized the mistake he made and this propelled him to be more balanced in the perspectives presented to students and he became more willing to have an open dialogue where racial inequity was common. As a result of his student teaching experience, Simon did not base his lessons on the racial make-up of his classes because a diverse class had “different voices that want to be heard. When you get into a homogenous

classroom where it is all Black or all White, it falls more on the teacher to create those other voices.” One could assume it would be easier to teach to a homogeneous group, but Simon found it is challenging because it “falls on me to be the others [voices].”

Simon believed the ways individuals reacted to issues were healthy. He shared that he always encouraged students to share their perspective on any issue as long as they gave evidence that supported their beliefs. Simon firmly stated he refused to share his personal perspective on any topic because he did “not want to be pigeonholed.” At times Simon had strong opinions, but he would not share them with students because “it makes it harder to engage them in a conversation because they think there is a right answer.” Simon wanted students to develop into their own person and did not want his opinions to influence them. At times students had become frustrated because rather than share his own opinion on an issue, Simon would ask, “what do you think?”

Mark, who teaches at the same school as Simon, stated parental influence was evident in his 11th grade students’ views on issues such as race, politics, and money, which he took into consideration when he taught. When Mark taught in a neighboring county, the “majority of the students’ parents did not want a black president.” His current students and their parents “were not opposed to his blackness but his liberalism.” It is evident students had preconceived notions before they entered Mark’s classroom which, in turn, influenced discussions “about every issue, race, politics, money, it is very broad.” With the students’ attitudes, Mark had labeled them with the persona of “rugged individualism and white supremacy.”

Mark found students’ preconceived notions made the introduction of controversial issues difficult. For example, Mark had two students with extreme differences in points of view on the Holocaust, which caused a disruption during one of his classes. He attributed this conflict to

their families' experiences and biases. One student's Jewish great-grandparent was a Holocaust survivor and the other student's family was Holocaust deniers. During Mark's lesson, the young Holocaust denier made the accusation "the Jews made it up to get sympathy and Hitler was right." Mark said he attempted to quickly diffuse the situation and told his students everyone had a right to their own opinions, but the survivor's great-grandson came out of his desk and an altercation ensued. Mark stated this did not deter him from discussing controversial issues and he knew "you have to find ways to throw water on it, but yeah, I have had some tense moments. It is a learning experience." Other experiences similar to this have emerged from discussions of politics, the economy, or race. As a result of Mark's teaching experience, he stated, "you see it coming and you find ways to cut it off." He attributed problems such as these in the classroom to the ideas instilled into these students by their families.

Repercussions. If controversial issues caused a division in society when someone's belief system was challenged, then it resulted in possible repercussions, whether it was from the students, parents, or administrators. Therefore, the participants had to consider how they approached topics to avoid repercussions. Mark thought he had settled the disagreement between the two above students regarding the Holocaust until a parent who was a Holocaust denier complained to Mark's administrator. That was the only time in Mark's teaching career he had a complaint on a Holocaust lesson. This parent accused Mark of showing propaganda to gain sympathy for the Jews. Mark was not reprimanded by his administrator and never heard anything else about the issue after the initial complaint. However, the experience definitely made him identify possible factors when he planned future lessons of what could erupt in his classroom and even considered "things you would not think of." Mark realized through this

paradigm that he, as well as all teachers, had to be ready for any situation that could arise in the classroom, because it could not be predicted what would trigger a negative classroom incident.

Lisa stated for the past several years she had been extremely cautious in her 6th grade course because of an experience where she “got burned” by a school administrator who was also the parent of one of her students. During a unit on the Underground Railroad, the participant added Frederick Douglass’ biography to the list of optional books students could read. If students chose to read that particular book, Lisa sent a permission letter home so parents would be aware of the offensive language. She asked parents to review the book and sign the form if they gave approval for their child to read the biography.

A parent who was in Afro-American studies at a local university sent Lisa a letter thanking her for adding this book to her reading list and stressed the importance of making it available to students. The superintendent’s son also returned the letter with permission to read the book. However, after the superintendent, who was Black, signed the permission form she contacted the Director of English Instruction who notified Lisa the book was not appropriate and should be removed from the reading list. Lisa was perplexed why the superintendent signed the permission form but then called and expressed her disapproval because she made the biography available. Lisa had made the decision to add the biography to her collection of books after she served on the Social Justice Council for Dade County where she concluded, “white teachers were not giving enough perspectives” in their classrooms. In an effort to offer multiple perspectives, Lisa used a *History Alive* simulation and purchased copies of Frederick Douglass’ biography. Lisa and the students “celebrated the bravery of people, passengers, and conductors” during thematic lessons on the Underground Railroad. While still visibly upset (to the point of tears) over this conflict with the superintendent/parent, Lisa stressed she “really wanted to be

thoughtful of African American students in my classroom who are accustomed to white, privilege textbooks.” Lisa did not want to be a teacher who scarred a child and at “40 years old they remember 6th grade when they felt singled out because of their color and it was my [Lisa’s] fault” and she did not want “to be that teacher.” When asked if Lisa thought the superintendent’s response was different because of their race differences, she did not hesitate and responded “Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, I do.”

This was not the first incident Lisa had with this superintendent. Lisa shared that after she attended a *History Alive* class she used a slavery simulation for several years. Tables were turned on their sides, the room was darkened, the room temperature was increased, and a PowerPoint slide was displayed with the image of a slave ship. The students entered the classroom in groups of three and they were told to kneel on the floor and primary sources about slavery were read in the dark, hot, and cramped quarters. Lisa taught the same superintendent’s daughter, and she talked with the superintendent before this simulation to make her aware of the activity. The superintendent told Lisa that in the role of her superior, she would not forbid her from using the activity, but in the role of a mother, she begged her not to use the simulation. The superintendent reasoned black students in the classroom had an ancestor who traveled on a slave ship and the simulation had the potential to influence them negatively.

“As a white teacher,” Lisa wanted to provide various perspectives in her classes, but added “I got in trouble for that and it really hurt my feelings.” Due to the issues with the superintendent, Lisa remained extremely cautious in her teaching even with her current white, supportive Director of English Instruction. These two events changed how Lisa utilized activities and resources in her classroom. Since that time, Lisa stated she has not planned any lessons that could create controversy and, as discussed earlier, whenever a controversial issue

arose in her classroom, she avoided it and told the students to talk to their parents. Lisa's biggest fear was repercussions from parents or administrators and it influenced how she taught her 6th grade students.

Preparing for citizenship. The standards for United States History included teaching skills of citizenship. The participants stated they realized the value of promoting citizenship with their students, but most participants did not believe they taught specific skills of citizenship and if they attempted to, they were not confident they were effective in doing so. The participants who taught these skills stated they did so by exposing students to multiple points of view. When various perspectives were introduced to students, there was a risk of controversy according to scholars (Barton & McCully, 2007; NCSS, 2012b) because the multiple points of view could cause a division in society (Philpott, et al., 2011). There were teachers who took these risks so students could develop skills of discussion, debate, and learn the art of compromise that, according to Hess (2009), provided skills for civic-mindedness. Additionally, if students examined the world beyond their own community, they would possibly be prepared to live as adults in a democracy. Unfortunately, the majority of participants did not believe they actually made a difference in molding students' citizenship and some did not attempt to do so whether this was due to their perceived time constraints or unwillingness to "shake things up" as Neal attempted to do.

As part of what she practiced in the classroom, Janet valued "big idea understanding and the ability to have a conversation" over the "cut and dry, skeletal, and surveyish [*sic*]" preparation for end of course tests. Janet stated she taught the way Loewen (2007) recommended and gave her students a realistic view of history as a means to prepare students to discuss our history rather than simply prepare them for the SOL test, which "is just one

assessment.” Janet’s goal was to cause her students to think and be able to discuss an issue rather than participate in rote learning to prepare for a test. By doing so, Janet hoped she prepared her students to become citizens who discussed issues in an educated manner.

Simon taught 11th grade Virginia and United States History whereas Janet taught 7th grade United States History: 1865 to Present, yet both gave students a similar view of our history. Simon stressed our country was founded on great ideals, but we were not perfect. He found the treatment of Native Americans and slaves was steeped in controversy with his students once he gave a “realistic view.” He taught students everything was not black or white and America was not only good or bad. He wanted students to understand they could disagree with something that happened. Additionally, he challenged his students to look into the future and not only at the past. Simon shared that he told students there were gradients in our history and America was not the only culture that has waxed and waned. Simon stated he helped his students understand decisions made by those before us though they were not always ideal in our history, but were possibly the only choice at the time.

Conrad stated he wanted to think he promoted civic-mindedness in his students, although he was not sure he did. He encouraged them to come to school and view it as a good place to “get good information.” He attempted to teach his students the proper ways to behave and be responsible in society. Although he realized the importance of the standards and high-stakes tests, he considered it only a part of the big picture. His goal was to be part of the puzzle that provided skills toward good citizenship and shared he attempted to do this through incorporation of controversial issues into his lessons. He found gun control and race to be the most controversial topics in his classroom and one of his favorite lessons addressed racial relations. This lesson was on the Civil Rights Movement and Conrad’s goal was to expose students to

various behaviors that represented good and bad citizenship. Conrad described the lesson where students were asked to consider if all men were truly created equal as stated in the Declaration of Independence and transitioned into a lesson about Jackie Robinson and his role during desegregation.

Neal's 11th grade students were close to the legal voting age, but he was not sure how much of an impact he had on them. He identified the media as a means to influence students and proposed a trait of a good citizen was keeping abreast of current events in the world, which led to discussions steeped in controversy. Numerous times Neal indicated he wanted to discuss controversial issues in his classroom and he was not afraid to do so, but he rarely did because his students were disengaged. He had not successfully incorporated current events into his classes because students would not read newspapers, did not watch the news on television or listen to it on their radios. He referenced the old adage "you can lead a horse to water but cannot make him drink," and, once again, he attributed this problem to what parents modeled at home. He wanted to do more with his students, but found it was difficult due to apathetic students, time constraints, he felt restricted because of the SOLs, and stated again, "if you don't have it at home, you can't get it done." Even with those challenges, he hoped he contributed to his students' civic-mindedness at least minimally since he encouraged them to work hard, do their homework, and apply themselves. Neal noted these students had not traveled beyond the confines of their community and their view of the world was restricted. Neal viewed students as simply going through the motions at school and he hoped one day what he said would click with them, although it probably would not be until they were 25 or 30 years old.

When individuals converge into a setting, they all come with different experiences. This research found the participants were influenced by their teaching experience, whether it was the

years they had taught or time they had taught their current course. At times it is difficult for teachers to separate their personal lives from their professional lives. Some participants were more willing than others to share their personal points of view although none were willing to share their political or religious beliefs. Mark found students' preconceived notions influenced the classroom environment with differences of opinions regarding the Holocaust to the point a disagreement became physical. Again, teaching experience would determine if a participant was willing to embrace controversy in the classroom.

Lisa experienced repercussions as a classroom teacher, which prevented her from incorporating any controversial topics into her lessons. If an issue happened to arise, she would not discuss it with her students and referred them to their parents for fear she would receive complaints because of her words or actions. It was the actions of the students that discouraged participants, such as Neal, from incorporating current events into the classroom. Participants realized the benefits of preparing their students for citizenship, but most felt they failed in doing so.

Standards. A requirement of the participants was to teach the state-mandated standards in preparation for the end of course high-stakes test. This research revealed that the teachers' abilities to go beyond teaching the minimum content required for the high-stakes test included factors such as their *content knowledge*, the allotted *time* they are given to teach the content, the *resources* used, which included controversial images, inappropriate language in primary sources, district approved textbooks, as well as the pressure of the *high-stakes, state mandated test*.

Neal was very comfortable with his content knowledge and because of his years of teaching experience, he knew the required material would be covered in time to review for the

state mandated test. Neal used different resources, some of which he knew would “be controversial and possibly offensive” and forewarned students of this.

Not everything is pretty in American history. You have your bad history and good history and your things that are controversial.

How do you teach the Holocaust without a few emaciated bodies?

How do you teach slavery without seeing a few chains and whips?

Everything is not pretty.

Content knowledge. Unlike high school teachers, middle school teachers could be assigned any course to teach. High school teachers are certified for specific content areas, whereas a middle school certification means a teacher could teach science one year, math the next year, and basically any subject they are needed to teach. During this research, Sharon taught 6th grade United States History: 1865 to Present for the 3rd year. Prior to this, she taught math for 16 years. Due to budget cuts, the school eliminated a 7th grade history position and Sharon was assigned to teach the history course. She was comfortable with the math content and was slowly becoming more comfortable with the history standards, although it was a difficult transition and she still did not feel successful teaching the course. Sharon attempted to incorporate current events into her classes, but had been unsuccessful. She always considered herself a “history person,” but found she was not comfortable with the history content and was struggling. She spent many hours during the week learning the content, but admitted she had not done a good job. She stated she struggled to simply cover the standards and usually did not go beyond the minimum required by the State of Virginia and admitted she had not covered all of the required material the previous year.

The first two years Sharon taught the course she did not cover all of the standards and her classes did not discuss any time past World War II. Her students performed poorly on the high-stakes test and last year she had a 60% passage rate, lower than the state average of 84% (Table 1). She attributed the low scores to “many of them [students] just don’t have the skills” and there was a lot of turnover in the elementary and middle school. Sharon added the young teachers who were hired did not have the content knowledge or experience and it was also difficult to get through all of the material in the allotted time. Sharon blamed the poor scores on her perceived time constraints and the students were not exposed to all of the required information because she did not teach all of the standards since it was “too much history to cover.” Sharon stated she enjoyed her interaction with students, but teaching was overwhelming and she would rather water plants at the local greenhouse than teach. Therefore, Sharon did not purposely incorporate controversial issues in her classroom because of the self-perceived time constraints as well as her fear of repercussions from parents and administrators. Sharon sensed she was being constantly scrutinized by administrators and had never felt this way when she taught math. She suspected the administrators were attempting to “getting rid of her” because of her low SOL scores.

Like Sharon, Conrad was an experienced teacher who was assigned to teach a new course. He had been teaching United States History: 1865 to Present to 7th graders for 15 years, but was assigned to also teach one class of United States History to 1865 to 6th graders. Conrad prided himself on his PowerPoint presentations, incorporation of controversial issues, and his knowledge of the content in the 7th grade course. Conrad admitted he did not attempt to teach the new course in the same way he had taught his 7th grade course. In the 7th grade course he had taught for several years, Conrad often used primary sources. He was comfortable with the

content of his United States History: 1865 to Present course and relied upon his own resources and did not distribute to his students the *Five Ponds* (Masoff, 2011) book provided to him by Dade County. However, Conrad stated with the new course, he felt as though he was a beginning teacher and was totally dependent on the *Five Ponds* (Masoff, 2011) textbook for the course and taught strictly to the standards. Additionally, he did not attempt to incorporate controversial issues into this new course. He viewed the new course as a house. The first year he was building the frame, which was using the standards and each year he would “decorate his house” and planned to incorporate more after he was comfortable with the content. Conrad spent a great deal of time on the new course because he stated he had to learn the content and prepare his lessons. Though Conrad felt like a novice teacher, he knew it was only temporary and each year there would be improvement.

Simon stated as a novice teacher, he was very comfortable teaching Advanced Placement United States History. He claimed to be a “history buff” and was very comfortable with the content because it was the locus of his studies in college. Simon proposed history should be presented to students the same whether it was an Advanced Placement or regular history class. He found the curriculum standards required a minimum based competency be exhibited and he focused on larger themes and did not follow the standards bullet by bullet. He did not want his instruction to be “drill and kill.” He attempted relevant teaching and assured parents that students would perform well on the high stakes test, but they also learned skills for critical analysis. He avoided using worksheets because the problem he had “with standard driven teaching is that it takes the teacher out.” Therefore, when he was a novice teacher, Simon refused to solely teach to the standards. Simon realized his vast knowledge of United States

History was a positive factor for the way he taught, even as a beginning teacher. He was comfortable with the content and willingly incorporated controversial issues into his lessons.

A factor that shaped the discussion for both novice and experienced teachers was content knowledge. Novice teachers were less likely to teach beyond the standards than experienced teachers who were comfortable with the content. Conrad had been very comfortable teaching the same course for 15 years, but when he was assigned a new course with unfamiliar content to teach he reverted to his methods of a novice teacher. The exception to this was Simon who incorporated controversial issues into his course as a novice teacher. He attributed his willingness to do this to his knowledge of United States History. Therefore, before a participant was willing to move beyond the standards to discuss controversial topics in the classroom, there needed to be confidence in content knowledge.

Time. When participants discussed the standards, one word usually emerged: time. Teachers were aware they must cover all of the state standards prior to testing in May, if they followed a traditional schedule. Most school districts provided a pacing guide for teachers, but the participants had to adjust this schedule for missed days for inclement weather and school events. Sharon stated it was impossible to cover all of the material in the time she was given so students were not exposed to all of the required material in the course she taught. This resulted in poor SOL scores, frustration for Sharon, and administrators who were not pleased with the scores. Sharon's frustration was intensified by the combination of her perceived time constraints and lack of content knowledge. She stated she did not understand how anyone could teach the required material in the allotted time indicated in her pacing guide. Sharon viewed this as impossible and when she planned lessons, she decided she would cover what she could and the

rest fell by the wayside. She stated the lack of time served as a factor in her planning and impeded her students' success on the high-stakes, standards-based test.

Alice indicated she was not stressed by the standards or high-stakes tests, but felt she was sprinting to cover all of the material in the allotted time. Early in her teaching career, this factor resulted in her reliance on teaching to the standards so she would cover all of the material before the standards-based, high-stakes test. With experience she had changed over the past few years. Alice had taught beyond the standards and incorporated the discussion of controversial issues. She stated it was a running joke with her students what previous history lesson from elementary or middle school she would ruin for them. For instance, she exposed her students to a different version of Columbus. Rather than students hear in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, she connected him to genocide so they would have a more realistic view of history. As an inexperienced teacher, she did not do this because of the perceived time constraints, but she used her experience as a factor in planning and taught in depth rather than students providing a superficial version of history. She stated she had learned if she taught beyond the standards and focused on "the real story," students were more interested in history, performed well on the high stakes test, and discussed events rather than memorize them.

Teachers were not consistent on how much time they spent on teaching certain topics, such as the Holocaust. It is taught in United States History: 1865 to Present, World History II, and Virginia and United States History. None of the 11th grade participants spent very much time on the Holocaust because they believed students were saturated with the Holocaust by their junior year. All of the 11th grade participants spent approximately 15 minutes when they taught the Holocaust because according to Alice, "students had been indoctrinated with it in middle school or in World History II."

It appeared some students were more exposed to the Holocaust than others according to the 7th grade participants. Conrad discussed the Holocaust for two days while Janet taught an entire unit that lasted nine days. Janet taught what she considered a “humanities course” to her 7th grade students, which was one class period of history and one of language arts. Therefore, Janet’s students were exposed to the Holocaust for a total of 18 class periods and each class period was 45 minutes long. She was very interested in the Holocaust and spent more time on this topic than any other participant in the research. Janet stated her students went beyond rote learning and discussed the issues because of the amount of time she spent teaching a topic such as the Holocaust.

Therefore, all students were not “indoctrinated with it in middle school” as the 11th grade participants, such as Alice, perceived. World History II was not a required course in some schools and if students did not take that course, it was four years between lessons on the Holocaust. Using Conrad, Sharon, and Janet as examples, the time teachers spent on teaching the Holocaust needed to be a factor in making decisions for 11th grade teachers. Sharon did not teach about the Holocaust at all due to her “lack of time” since it fell at the end of the academic year. Conrad discussed the Holocaust for two days, and Janet’s students were exposed to it for 18 class periods. Therefore, there was a range of exposure to this time in our history.

The participants did not identify the Vietnam War or 9/11 as controversial topics in their classrooms because they spent very little time on Vietnam and most did not discuss 9/11. Ben said he did not know exactly how much time he spent teaching the Vietnam War, but it was a minimal amount. Simon only spent one day on the entire Vietnam War. Alice indicated she spent very little, if any time at all, on 9/11 because it was “too new” and her required standards ended with the era of Reagan. The Vietnam War was briefly covered because of time constraints

and Jerry spent only one day on the Vietnam War. He showed “very graphic images,” such as the Saigon execution photo, the napalmed Vietnamese girl, and Agent Orange photographs. Ben spent little time on the Vietnam War and his words summarized what was expressed by many of the 11th grade participants, “by the time we get to the Vietnam War, we are pushing toward the end.” Ben found due to time constraints placed on him to cover the material, little time could be dedicated to the Holocaust, Vietnam War, or 9/11. These topics were taught at the end of the year and teachers were concerned with the high-stakes tests and needed to review. Due to this perceived lack of time, teachers did not approach controversial issues associated with the Vietnam War or 9/11.

The participants indicated if they had more time with students, they would go more in depth with topics, such as the Vietnam War and 9/11. Due to testing, participants had to push at the end of the academic year to cover the material and review before the standards-based, high-stakes test. High school participants perceived the students had been “indoctrinated” with the Holocaust by middle school teachers. The amount of time the students studied the Holocaust in middle school was not consistent. For instance, Janet went into much more depth about the Holocaust through her blended history and language arts classes.

Content resources. The availability of the Internet allowed teachers to collect teaching resources with the click of a button. Of course, educators needed to be careful to ensure the websites were reputable with accurate information. School districts provided resources for teachers, but the sources available to teachers were endless through organizations, such as the Library of Congress. Through photographs and text, students were allowed to step into the time they were studying in an attempt to understand the mindset of people during the era examined.

Simon was cognizant of the standards; however, he did not allow them to guide his teaching and he actually questioned the abilities of any educator who used them as a “cornerstone to their teaching.” He viewed the standards as minimal and if they were taught in isolation, students were provided with a functional understanding of the period discussed, but indicated, “it will be sterile.” Simon proposed the standards were a method for “bureaucratic accountability for what transpires in the classroom.” He stressed with parents at the beginning of the academic year that he would cover the standards, but they were not his daily focus. Simon preferred to teach in a broader context.

Images. Simon explained the resources he used for his lessons, which included primary sources, secondary sources, and images, some of which he considered graphic. He rarely used his textbook and when he did, it was simply as a resource. Simon did not hesitate on the type of images he showed his students. His goal was to provide a realistic view of our history—blemishes and all. Therefore, when teaching about race relations, he showed white people demonstrating against Blacks. He added his students expressed to him how they thought it was unfathomable to know white people acted this way toward another race, but he showed the proof in the pictures (See Figure 3).

Simon found his students perceived images in a mature manner and this served as a factor for his willingness to show even bolder images in his classroom. He said he discussed tense race relations and how white individuals gathered and watched the lynching of black individuals. He told students these acts of violence were “almost like a picnic” and white attendees would smile next to the bodies of Blacks who had been lynched. He supported the use of graphic images and stated he could tell his students what happened, but the image would be ingrained in their memory of what was in our country’s history. Therefore, one of the photographs shown was of

three black men who were lynched and surrounded by white witnesses (See Figure 4). The photograph was actually a post card of men who worked at the Duluth Circus, had been accused of rape by a white girl, and lynched. Simon stated he realized his images bothered some students, but “it happened and if they are not shown, the human qualities will be taken out of the event and the victims will become a number without a face.” If such images were not shown, Simon proposed history would be sterilized and students would remember only the facts for the test and he did not “feel like that is our purpose.”

Due to her prior experiences, Lisa was cautious and did not “show tough images.” Lisa spoke of what she considered a powerful image of a slave with deep scars on his back from beatings and stated she wanted to use this in her lessons, but did not because she feared it would result in repercussions from administrators or parents. This image was of a runaway slave, named Gordon, and was publicly displayed in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture’s wing in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History at the time of this research. Conrad and all high school participants, with the exception of Ben, used this image in their classrooms without any issues. (See Figure 5).

Conrad did not show an image of a lynching, but Janet did not hesitate to do so with her 12 to 13 year old students in her 7th grade class. Janet stated she showed “tough images” such as individuals who had been lynched (Figure 6) and never had any complaints or suffered any repercussions although she believed this image had the potential to create controversy.

Figure 3 – *Segregation in schools: Clinton High School, TN. (1956, August).*

Retrieved from <http://www.ernie-jones.com/segregation.jpg>

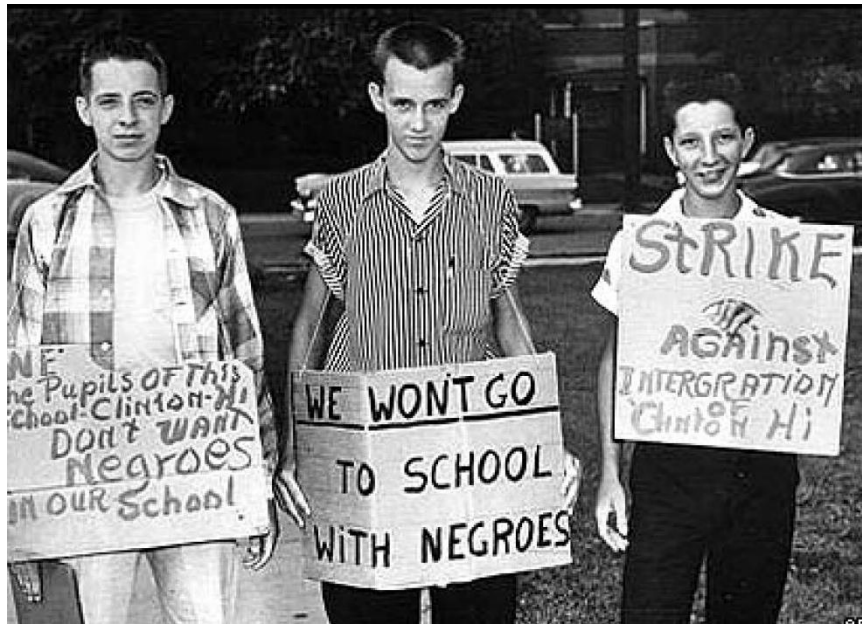


Figure 4 – *Clayton, McGhie, & Jackson, Duluth, Minn. (1920, June 15). Accused of rape. Library of Congress. Prints and photographs division, visual materials of NAACP records. [Reproduction No. LC-USZ62-35347].*



Figure 5 –*Gordon Under Medical Inspection* (1863). Beaten runaway slave. Library of Congress
Prints and photographs division. [Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-98515].



Figure 6 – *Two African American men lynched, hanging from tree, Marion,*

Ind. (1930). Lynched African American men. Library of Congress. Prints and photographs division. [Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-35347].



Language. A factor that created controversy in some classrooms for most of the participants was language. When they used primary sources and came upon the word “Negro,” the majority of the participants would use the term in context. There were a few participants who stated they used the N-word in context if it were in a document. However, most refused to use the term under any circumstances. There were a minimal number of participants who admittedly used other forms of profanity when they taught.

Simon appeared to be a confident teacher, who was familiar with his content, stated he used various pedagogical strategies as well as a plethora of resources, but he admitted discomfort with the linguistics found in some of the documents. Once he came upon the N-word in a document and chose not to verbalize the word, so he had students read the document silently. He did not have to make this decision during his student teaching placement because the N-word was banned by the school district—even if it was used in context in a primary source. He attributed his discomfort with the N-word to his upbringing and the fact he did not use profanity. Simon speculated a slight possibility he would eventually use this N-word in the future, but not any time soon. He stated it would be at least five to ten years after he had gained more teaching experience, but still doubted he would use the “N-word” at that point. He did not want to “alter a student in a negative way or make them think poorly about what we are trying to do.” He believed if he attempted to use the “N-word,” students would sense his discomfort and, in turn, they would be uncomfortable.

Simon taught at Leesburg High School with Mark who used the N-word in context, although he did so sparingly and only when examining documents. Mark believed this term must be used when the Jim Crow era was discussed or it took away the meaning of what was being read. When he was a beginning teacher, he was faced with the decision of whether or not

he used the “offensive term.” He consulted family members who were teachers, which included his mother, father, and stepmother, and they all agreed, “It will take some of the power away if you use another word.” He admitted he still hesitated and prefaced its use with the students so they were prepared. When he used what he called “an extremely offensive term”, he did not experience any repercussions and the students handled it in a mature manner.

At Spencer Heights School, Neal did not exclude the terms “Negro” or the N-word if they were in a source being discussed. Earlier in his teaching career, when he used such terms his students reacted, “seemed bothered by the term, and it created some controversy,” but in the past few years the students did not appear upset if they read or heard the term or any form of profanity. Although he taught in a strong, Baptist-based community, when Neal taught about World War II, he shared General George Patton’s crude language with his students. General Patton was known to curse heavily and Neal perceived by using General Patton’s words, students would better understand the type of man he was. If students appeared surprised when Neal used this language, he told them “don’t act like you have never heard it or said it. I tell them that I see you folks in the hallway. I hear what you say.” Neal never had complaints as a result of the profanity he used in his classroom. He realized when he used this language it opened the door to controversy, but he was not deterred. Neal stated terms or anything within the standards could be made controversial. He proposed that controversy arose more for how something was approached rather than the topic itself. He found race relations the most controversial issue he taught, but it could be taught to be more or less controversial. If he used the term “Nigger” in his lesson, it was likely to be more controversial than if he said N-word.

At Red River High School, Alice gave a mini-linguistics lesson when she taught about slavery. She taught her students the negative connotation of black, such as black magic and the

black market. Stereotypes of the Mammy, Sambo, and Uncle Tom were discussed, but Alice “did not use the term Nigger because I do not want to open that can of worms.” She did not use any primary sources that contained the term, but if she found a document she thought was essential then she would possibly use the term. Alice, like Neal, used profanity for “shock value” and gave an example of a Civil War lesson. Each year she told her students one valuable lesson learned from the Civil War was “you don’t shit where you sleep.” Alice noted these are the types of things students remembered from her class. She did not randomly use profanity in her classes, but purposefully chose the words and when she used them it was to enhance her lesson and get the students’ attention.

None of the 6th or 7th grade teachers in any of the schools used the N-word even if it were in context within a primary source. Lisa stated she would never use the term “Negro if it is in the literature.” When the word “Negro” was in a primary source document, she said she explained to the students anytime the word “N-e-g-r-o (spelling it out) is used it will be substituted with African American” because she was not comfortable using either term, although it was used during the time period in history being discussed.

Janet considered herself bold in her pedagogical practices, but did not use the N-word in her 7th grade class because she did not come upon it in any documents. She would use the term “Negro” in context. Janet did not verbalize any profane words, but included in her optional reading list the book *Fallen Angels*. The students were warned that it contained the “F-word.” She did not seek a formal note of permission from parents if students chose to read the book, but told students they were to ask their parents for permission before they began the book. She realized many read the book without parental permission, but she never had any complaints. She refused to use *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the language arts portion of her

“humanities class” because of the racial slurs. It was not because she was afraid of the terms “Negro” or the N-word in the book, but she chose not to due to the “conservative censorship that would try to get in the way of it.” To her, if there was objection to the terms in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the offensive terms had to be replaced with African American or slave, the value of the book would be removed.

It did not appear that teaching experience influenced the controversial language used in the classroom, but more so the participants’ personal comfort with the terminology. Janet did not use resources, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with offensive language because she did not want parents or administrators to alter the language in the text. If that was going to be done, she chose not to use the text at all. Most participants were not comfortable using the N-word under any circumstance, but participants such as Neal and Janet purposely used graphic language as a means to get the students’ attention through “shock value” of their words.

Textbooks. All of the participants’ schools in this research still used hard copies of textbooks in their classrooms. The majority of the participants’ only had a class set of textbooks and their students did not have a textbook distributed to them. Each student had the ability to access their textbook online if they were outside of the school building. This presented a problem for the participants because many students did not have Internet access in their homes. However, the majority of the participants stated they used their textbook as a resource while a few used it as a guide for their teaching.

In his United States History: 1865 to the Present course, Conrad gathered his own material from outside sources and chose not to use the district approved *Five Ponds: Our America* textbook (Masoff, 2011) because he did not see the book as a valuable source. As a matter of fact, these textbooks were stacked on a bookcase and had never been distributed to

students or even used during his classes. However, as stated earlier, in the new course he taught (United States History to 1865), he did rely on the *Five Ponds* textbook (Masoff, 2011) for his teaching. Conrad stated this would be the only year he used the textbook and once he was more familiar with the content, he would find his own resources.

Janet also had the *Five Ponds* (Masoff, 2011) textbook and she occasionally used it in class. She stated if she taught from the textbook, she could teach all of the required standards in one semester. Janet stated the book aligned explicitly with the standards and promoted rote learning. Therefore, she did not use the textbook and, instead, used primary sources. Janet amassed her resources from the National Archives, other people's lessons, the Internet, and workshops she attended. She stated the textbook did have some good photographs she occasionally referred to and a novice teacher would likely benefit from using the textbook, but it was not a valuable tool to her. Janet did add it could be beneficial for review prior to the standardized test because each chapter was aligned with a specific standard and gave questions students could be asked (See Figure 7).

In Burch County, Sharon used the same *Five Ponds* (Masoff, 2011) textbook Dade County had approved and distributed, and she utilized it almost daily in her classroom. The first two years she taught history, Sharon did not believe Burch County School District provided the resources she needed, which led her to rely solely on the Department of Education's Blueprints for her instruction. She was elated when she received the *Five Ponds* (Masoff, 2011) textbook, especially since it aligned strictly with the standards. The sole complaint Sharon had about the textbooks was that she only had a class set. Like Conrad's students, many of Janet's students were not able to access the textbooks online because they did not have Internet in their homes.

Figure 7 – Five Ponds textbook example (Five Ponds Press, *Our America: 1865 to Present*, 2011 , p. 80).

PAGES 80-81

SOL Essential Knowledge

USII.4c
African American responses:

- Booker T. Washington: Believed equality could be achieved through vocational education; accepted social segregation
- W.E.B. Du Bois: Believed in full political, civil, and social rights for African Americans.

SOL Essential Question

- How did African Americans respond to discrimination and “Jim Crow?”

Access Prior Knowledge/ Anticipate Learning

- Read the “In His Own Words” passage by Booker T. Washington. Why do you think this building was significant to him? What did the building represent? How did he think this building would bring new meaning to his life?
- Read the “In His Own Words” passage for W.E.B. Du Bois. Can you relate to the conflict he describes? As a teenager (or almost-teenager), do you ever feel that you are looking at yourself through the eyes of others? Do you imagine that this will change as you become an adult? Do you imagine that W.E.B. Du Bois ever thought this would change for him or other African Americans?

Read and Discuss

- What was the fundamental difference in the way these two leaders wanted to achieve equality?
- What was Washington’s life like as a child?
- What was Du Bois’ life like as a child?
- How did the childhood experiences of each man influence his adult philosophy?
- Education was a significant part of both men’s strategies. Who did Washington believe should be educated and on what subject matter? Who did Du Bois believe should be educated and on what subject matter?
- Which strategy do you think was most successful? Which was limiting? Why?
- These men were rivals, but how do you think they could have worked together without each

African Americans differed in their responses to discrimination and “Jim Crow.”

Two Men, Two Ways

Two brilliant African American leaders had very different ideas about how best to achieve equality. Each was sure his way was the best.

SKILLS OR SMARTS?

One of the most intense debates of the Jim Crow years focused on the education of African American people. On one side sat Booker T. Washington, who believed that the best way for African Americans to get ahead was by getting a vocational education—especially by learning agricultural and technical skills.

At the college he founded, Tuskegee Institute, students studied things like furniture making and machine repair, as well as English and chemistry. Washington accepted the notion that segregation was a fact of life. He thought it was best to accept it, learn to live with it, and try to move forward in spite of it.

On the other side of the debate sat W.E.B. Du Bois, a brilliant man who believed in full political, civil, and social rights for African Americans. He argued that black minds had to be challenged at the nation’s best colleges in order to produce the next great generation of leaders—people who could stand shoulder to shoulder with whites in ALL walks of life.

The two men soon became bitter rivals.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

On seeing Hampton Institute, in eastern Virginia, for the first time, after traveling for many weeks:

“...the first sight of the large three-story brick building seemed to have rewarded me for all that I had undergone...It seemed to me to be the largest and most beautiful building I had ever seen...I felt a new existence had begun—that life would have new meaning. I felt like I had reached the promised land.”

**BOOKER T. WASHINGTON:
QUIET DIGNITY THROUGH WORK**

Booker T. Washington was born into slavery on a farm in Franklin County, Virginia. He first walked into a schoolroom as a slave, carrying the books of his master’s daughter. After he gained his freedom, young Washington took a job in a salt mine, starting his day at 4 AM so he could go to school. He was determined to get an education, and when he heard of a school that would accept black students—Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia—he made his way hundreds of miles, much of it on foot, to attend.

Education changed his life. He became a teacher and in 1881 founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which became a respected center for black education. His book, *Up from Slavery*, and his life, lived with great optimism and dignity, were an inspiration to future civil rights leaders.

1856-1915

Using the Information: Poetry

Dudley Randall has written a rhyming ballad expressing the disagreement between Washington and Du Bois titled “Booker T. and W.E.B.” A copy of the poem can be found on **TWO MEN TWO WAYS REPRODUCIBLE 79** and should be copied and distributed to each student.

Begin by having the students read the poem silently. Then read it aloud to them. After each stanza give students the opportunity to share their interpretation of what Randall’s point is about the man speaking.

Discuss the meter and rhythm of the poem and ask students how they believe it conveys the mood and meaning of the poem. Then discuss Randall’s use of repetition of “It seems to me” and “I disagree,” and how that also influences the mood and meaning.

Conclude by having students write the final stanza of the poem. They need to follow the meter and rhythm of the previous stanzas and include another example of Washington and Du Bois’ differences.

By choice, Sharon taught strictly to the standards because of her lack of content knowledge and her perceived time constraints. When Mark was a novice teacher, an administrator told him other issues could be discussed, but he was required to document he had taught the required material. Mark reasoned documentation was necessary since “that is ultimately what the standardized test is based on and it was covering your behind, that you document that you had exposed the standards to the students that are tested by the state.” Mark had high SOL passing rates—around 93% each year (Appendix C).

High-stakes, state mandated testing. At some point in their career, all teachers have dealt with students who had test anxiety. This psychological condition caused students to become stressed at the thought of testing. The emphasis placed on the Commonwealth of Virginia’s SOL test has caused stress for students and teachers. Some participants felt as though their job was dependent on high passing rates and schools made students aware they needed to pass these standards-based tests to earn verified credits in order to graduate.

Alice typically had good passing scores for the SOL test and was not concerned about the standards although “when they don’t pass, my heart hurts for them. I want them to be good citizens, good thinkers. I want them to be well rounded. They can look this stuff up, but they can’t look up how to be a good person and good citizen.” Janet’s 7th grade students always did well on the SOL test and she attributed this to her “humanities course.” Not only were students able to learn the minimum required by the Commonwealth of Virginia, but also discussed issues rather than memorized facts. Neal had a matter-of-fact attitude regarding his students who passed the SOL test. He gave them the information and either students retained it or did not and Neal attributed his limited influence to a lack of parental participation.

As a new teacher, Ben stated he was not prepared when someone handed him a book and the standards to teach. He did not believe college prepared him to teach and experience developed him into a teacher. As a beginning teacher, Ben based what he taught on the standards because he believed “they are everything about teaching now.” He used them as his script because “teachers are held accountable to the standards.” Ben admittedly relied heavily on the standards as a novice teacher and continued the same practice after twelve years of teaching. He confirmed he was a very conservative teacher and did not show graphic images, used some primary sources, but mainly used his textbook and the supplementary material provided by the textbook company. Ben did not want negative attention drawn to him and believed the students’ test scores measured a teacher’s success. Since he felt teachers were held accountable for their students’ performance on the standards-based, high-stakes tests, he thought he must teach to the test or his job would be jeopardized. Ben tended “to err on the conservative side rather than push the envelope a little bit.” He did not believe he would have administrative support if parents complained about supplementary material that was controversial. “I need to think about my job too. I don’t think I would be backed up at higher levels.” Ben was the only high school participant who linked discussion of controversial issues to the possibility of being terminated from his teaching position.

Sharon was an experienced teacher who taught a new course strictly by the standards. She was not comfortable with the content and expressed concern about her previous scores. Her students’ scores were low the previous year and she blamed herself for this because she did not teach all of the required material. Sharon felt administrators scrutinized her and if students continued to perform poorly on the standards-based, high-stakes test, then her job would be in

jeopardy. Sharon felt such an immense amount of pressure that she was considering leaving the teaching profession that she wanted to remain in.

The high-stakes, standards-based tests were not a factor for all participants that shaped their discussion of controversial issues. Participants, such as Alice and Janet, believed if they taught beyond the standards students would do well on the SOL test and there were benefits to not teaching to the test. However, other participants were stressed about the high-stakes test and taught close to the standards and avoided controversial issues, which shaped their discussion of controversial issues.

Summary

All participants in this research were secondary level United States History teachers in schools with enrollment between 219 students and 1,110 students (Table 1). The schools varied with less than 20% and up to 65% of the student bodies who received free or reduced lunches. Seven participants were 11th grade teachers who taught either Virginia and United States History or AP United States History. One participant taught United States to 1865 history and four taught United States History: 1865 to Present. One participant taught both United States to 1865 history as well as United States History: 1865 to Present. These five teachers taught either 6th or 7th grades.

There were three categories that emerged in the research in relation to factors that influenced teachers' willingness to incorporate controversial issues into their classroom as well as how they defined such issues, which included *Place*, *Experience*, and *Standards*. *Place* included the geographic location, preconceived notions, and the role of the media, which teachers identified as factors that created controversy and their willingness to introduce them in their courses. Students exhibited preconceived notions on issues, which were influenced by their

family and community within the context of place. *Experience* consisted of developed perceptions based on what the teachers and students had encountered in their lives. This included teaching experiences, points of view on issues, possible repercussions from the introduction of controversial issues in the classroom, as well as if participants promoted citizenship to develop civic-minded individuals as stated in the Commonwealth of Virginia's Standards of Learning. This influenced teachers' willingness to introduce controversial issues into their standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. Finally, the category of *standards* included the participants' content knowledge, their perceived time to teach the required material, as well as resources used to cover the state-mandated content in preparation for high-stakes testing. The resources included images, use of language, and textbooks. All of these were factors in how teachers prepared for the standards-based, high-stakes test and whether they found the issues controversial or were willing to incorporate them into their classrooms.

When participants defined a controversial issue in the context of their classroom, it was found they viewed the media as a factor that influenced the controversy of an issue. The media did shape discussion of controversial issues in the classroom primarily through secondary sources since most students would not watch or read current events. Though all of the factors contributed to shaping discussions of controversial issues, the most influential identified by the participants was place. The participants asserted students were more influenced by their family and community because students often voiced what was obviously being said in their homes. The development of these preconceived notions were dependent on geographic location. Students in the regions of this research were concerned they would lose their guns and ability to hunt after the 2012 presidential election. Though gun control was a hot button issue throughout the country, it was asserted the views of students in New York City were likely different than in

Burch County or Dade County. New York City students might be concerned for other reasons than hunting. When students asked about the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in Lisa's class, she quickly moved on. Undoubtedly, schools located close to that region answered students' questions and provided reassurance. It was possible this was done in classrooms in the region of the research, but there was no evidence to support that with these participants.

Therefore, place appeared to play a role in how the participants defined a controversial issue based on their geographic location and preconceived notions when students are exposed to multiple points of view that challenged their beliefs or those of their families and community.

Place, experiences, and the standards were factors that influenced the incorporation of controversial issues into secondary level United States History classrooms as mentioned beforehand. Additionally, participants identified issues they deemed controversial within the standards they teach. After a review of the literature, it was anticipated that race relations, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 would be the most controversial issues discussed in a 21st century standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. However, participants indicated race relations were very controversial in the classroom, but the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 were not. The lack of controversy attached to these issues were possibly due to the geographic location of the schools, the pressure teachers felt to cover all of the material in the allotted time, or because students could not personally relate to these times in our history.

As novice teachers, the participants initially struggled with content knowledge and classroom management. This led teachers to follow the standards closely in those first years of teaching. Research also indicated that the same was true if an experienced teacher was assigned to teach a new course. The research found some experienced participants continued to use the

standards as their primary staple for designing instruction to ensure their students performed well on the state-mandated test.

It is undeniable that teaching is a challenging profession. However, this research indicated that place, experiences, and the standards influenced teachers' pedagogical practices. This research involved a selected group of participants in central and mid-Western Virginia. To build upon this research and determine if these findings are more widespread than in these two regions, additional participants from larger areas need to be included in future research.

Chapter Five

This study was constructed to understand the topics secondary level history and social science teachers identified as controversial within the context of their classrooms and what determined their willingness to incorporate these issues. This chapter presents information derived from this study as well as results of the data presented in Chapter Four. A summary of the project, discussion of findings and educational implications, significance of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research are also included within this chapter.

Summary of the Project

The paramount purpose of this study was to understand the factors that shaped secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they considered controversial issues in their teaching of United States History in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. To understand these factors, there was first a need to determine what factors secondary level United States History teachers identified as influential in creating the controversy attached to an issue discussed in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom.

Problem Statement

Controversial issues are topics that have multiple points of view with competing answers and the potential to cause a division in society, which can be influenced by the audience (Barton & McCully, 2007; Hess, 2009; NCSS, 2012b; Philpott et al., 2011; Washington & Humphries, 2011). Teachers often avoided the incorporation of controversial issues into their classrooms because they feared repercussions from students, parents, or their administrators (Philpott et al., 2011) or felt pressure to strictly teach the state-mandated standards (Meyer, 2010).

One of the many responsibilities of teachers was to prepare students for the standards-based, high-stakes test given at the end of the academic year. Often a teacher's classroom success was connected to her students' scores on the standardized test. Therefore, many teachers felt they had to adhere to the standards and cover them within their perceived time constraints, which dictated their pedagogical decisions. Scholars found the incorporation of controversial issues were beneficial to students, but many teachers were not willing to take this leap into contentious waters. If teachers were not trained how to teach beyond the standards, it often resulted in mistakes in the classroom or mediocre lessons where the goal was not to promote student growth, but regurgitate facts to pass the standardized test. After an examination of literature, this study provided a lens into teachers' perspectives to understand factors of how they defined controversial issues and ways these issues influenced their teaching in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom.

Key Literature

The controversy of an issue is socially constructed, especially if it is one that is current, not settled, and still open for debate (Hess, 2009; Washington & Humphries, 2011). An issue that is controversial is considered open because it has multiple perspectives whereas a closed issue is noncontroversial and has one point of view (Camica, 2008). These issues can result in differences of opinions when individuals are exposed to multiple points of view (Hess, 2009) that go against preconceived notions developed by their geographic location (Washington & Humphries, 2011). This can influence classroom environments "yet in a democratic society, controversy is what defines the social studies" (Philpott et al., 2011, p. 32). Hess (2009) proposes controversy is healthy for a democratic society since it encourages critical analysis, which can build skills for citizenry and empower individuals to make educated decisions.

Preconceived notions garnered from an individual's environment can contribute to the formation of perspectives on issues and can translate into the classroom where teachers must consider their students' points of view and psychological safety (Baker, 2004), but also the standards they are required to teach.

Three salient themes emerged from the literature that influenced the controversy of issues and how they were discussed in classrooms: *place*, *experience*, and *standards*. Place included geographic location, preconceived notions, and the role of the media in creating controversy. Place also made meaning of the daily experiences of individuals and influenced the way ideas were developed (Tilley, 2012). Therefore, individuals' geographic location, as well as their family and community, influenced preconceived notions.

Experience influenced teachers' willingness to incorporate controversial issues into an academic setting. Often teachers avoided these issues or treaded carefully (Hess, 2009). Controversial issues often spontaneously arose in the classroom and educators were more likely to discuss them if they felt they had the support of parents and administrators (Hess, 2004). It was possible for controversial issues to become zealous without causing harm to students and could also develop analytical skills (Hess, 2011). Evans, Avery, and Pederson (1999) found teachers avoided controversial topics out of fear of divergence from their school district's preapproved curriculum.

Many educators considered the standards as the linchpin for learning. Novice teachers faced many challenges the first year in the classroom and standards-based, high-stakes testing accountability "exacerbate the stress and pressure faced by beginning teachers" (van Hover, Hicks, & Irwin, 2007, p. 900). Even if teachers searched for strategies to enhance students' learning and moved beyond the standards, they were possibly instructed to "teach to the test—it

is how you will be evaluated” (Meyer, 2010, p. 23). It was found that standards “have constrained, limited, and narrowed what teachers feel they are capable of doing (van Hover, Hicks & Irwin, 2007, p. 91).

Washington and Humphries (2011) found teachers chose one of four stances regarding controversial issues: Exclusive Neutrality, Exclusive Partiality, Neutral Impartiality, or Committed Partiality. Exclusive Neutrality was avoidance of controversial issues and teachers abided to the established curriculum. Exclusive Partiality promoted a teacher’s points of view and controversial issues were discussed. Educators chose not to share any of their opinions through the stance of Neutral Impartiality though they still discussed controversial topics. Finally, according to Washington and Humphries (2011), Committed Impartiality included teachers who incorporated controversial issues and carefully chose when to share their own perspectives on issues.

The literature revealed the primary topics that came to the forefront as controversial were race relations, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 (Cowan & Matiles, 2012; Hess & Stoddard, 2007, 2011; Howard, 2004; Philpott et al., 2011; Washington & Humphries, 2011). The controversy was intensified by the focus the media placed on these topics as well as the points of view of the audience (Washington & Humphries, 2011). Teachers who were willing to incorporate these issues were comfortable with their content knowledge (Hendrix, 1981; Hess, 2009) and curriculum. David (2011) found the state-mandated standards had the potential to dictate the curriculum but teachers, in the role of gatekeepers, made daily decisions in the classroom (Thornton, 2005), which had the potential to include controversial issues.

Methodology

This study examined the factors teachers found influential that created controversy attached to an issue discussed in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. After it was determined what teachers deemed controversial, I sought to understand what factors shaped their willingness to introduce controversial issues into their teaching. The questions I sought to answer were:

Overarching question. What factors shape secondary level United States History teachers' willingness to introduce what they consider controversial issues in their teaching of United States History in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms?

Supporting question. What factors do secondary level United States History teachers identify as influential in creating the controversy attached to an issue discussed in their standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom?

For this research I used qualitative phenomenological research. I desired a method of data collection that was flexible, allowed for modification of strategies and gave me the ability to analyze and collect data simultaneously; therefore I used qualitative research (Burgess, 1985). Phenomenology provided a lens into individuals' consciousness (Anfara & Mertz, 2006) and the relevance of events with individuals in specific situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Teachers' responses and interactions had the potential to be influenced by knowledge and lived experiences. Purposeful and convenience sampling were used to interview (Patton, 1980) twelve secondary level United States History teachers. All participants were white, six were male and six were female who taught 6th, 7th, or 11th grades. The only criteria used was they taught United States History in a public school in the Commonwealth of Virginia where students were required to take a state-mandated, high-stakes test at the end of the course. The research took place in five

schools within two counties in Central Virginia or mid-Western Virginia. Schools were located either in a small town or rural area. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, schools, and districts.

Data collection. The data was collected using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as well as focus groups meetings. Participants provided scenarios of their teaching experiences as well as resources used in their classrooms. All interviews took place in the natural setting of the participants' classrooms so they were more prone to be at ease (Gardner & LaPaglia, 2006) and possibly more willing to honestly and openly answer questions and discuss their views on controversial issues

Data analysis. Data analysis began during the interview process (Hatch, 2002). Patterns, categories, and themes were identified (Patton, 1980), the perceived teachers' stances easily and clearly fit into one of the four stances of Exclusive Neutrality, Exclusive Partiality, Neutral Impartiality, or Committed Impartiality (Washington & Humphries, 2011). The data was read multiple times and coded to find examples to either support or repudiate the findings from the literature review (Hatch, 2002).

Discussion of Findings and Educational Implications

From the data collected in this research and the review of literature, three salient themes emerged of the way participants defined controversial issues and determined if they were willing to broach these topics in their classrooms: *place*, *experience*, and *standards*. Students' preconceived notions were developed by their geographic location and influenced which topics were controversial and if, or how, these were addressed in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom. Tilley (2012) asserts place makes meaning of the daily experiences of individuals and influences the way ideas are developed. The state-mandated standards were ever-present in all

classrooms and participants claimed they had the ability to make any topic within the standards controversial whether it was through the content, resources used, or the way a topic was taught.

The families of students where the participants taught consisted of unskilled laborers to professionals, which influenced their socioeconomic status. The communities' political and religious ideologies ranged from conservatives to liberals. Realizing most school communities consist of individuals with differing ideologies adds an element of concern for teachers who are contemplating incorporating controversial issues into the classroom. This means teachers may have to tread carefully when broaching contentious issues.

Influential factors that create controversy. All participants similarly defined a controversial issue, which closely matched the definitions of the scholars. The majority of participants asserted the primary factors that created controversy in the classroom were students' preconceived notions and their exposure to multiple points of view. Perspectives that were contrary to students' beliefs, which had been instilled by their family and community, opened the door for controversy. One participant, Neal, argued if students were from a more culturally rich environment, such as Northern Virginia, they would be interested in events outside of their community and this would be reflected in the classroom. Neal became frustrated with his students because they would not discuss issues and exhibited a lackadaisical attitude toward learning. Neal attributed his students' attitudes to their inability to travel outside of their community due to their low socioeconomic status. He blamed parents for not modeling good practices of staying up-to-date on current events and indicated this would not happen in more culturally rich environments. Teachers from the Northern Virginia area were not part of this research, so it is unclear if they faced the same classroom issues as Neal. However, it cannot be assumed, as Neal asserted, that all students in a more culturally rich environment produced the

type of student who would be more engaged in discussions. It is true the students from Northern Virginia would be more culturally diverse than Neal's students, but just because they lived in that particular area did not mean their parents were professionals thereby producing a different caliber of students as Neal assumed. Socioeconomically challenged students would be found in Northern Virginia, just as they were in Neal's school. Unfortunately, a low socioeconomic status and childhood experiences are linked to cognitive abilities, even into adulthood (Hackman & Farah, 2009). Therefore, I assert socioeconomic status played a role in students' attitudes toward learning as well as the values instilled in them by family, friends, and the community. Yet, regardless of socioeconomic status, it cannot be denied individuals were influenced by their geographic location. If these factors produce indolent students, there is the risk that teachers, such as Neal, will lower their classroom expectations. Higher-level thinking will be abandoned regardless of the probable benefits, which includes the incorporation of controversial issues.

The participants in this research identified race relations as the most controversial issue in their classrooms. Alice and Jerry attributed their close proximity to a Civil War site as a factor that influenced their students' preconceived notions. Additionally, Emily, Janet, Lisa, Alice, and Conrad claimed the Ku Klux Klan existed in their community and presumed their students' racial ideologies resulted from the influence of parents or grandparents. Alice altered her lesson out of fear a racist slur would be voiced in her classroom after the 2008 presidential election. She attributed her fears to the students' geographic location, which influenced their perspectives. These were influential factors that impacted classroom decisions. Therefore, the participant's assumption of how students would respond to outside factors limited her willingness to incorporate controversial issues into the classroom to allow more meaningful learning.

Location and audience played a role in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Students exhibited racist tendencies when Obama was elected president in 2008, but during the 2012 presidential election they were concerned about their rights to bear arms. Students' concerns regarding their Second Amendment rights were attributed to the dialogue after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. After this horrific event, the media focused on gun control, which gave evidence the media served as a nerve center for debates as noted by teachers from Griffith Middle School, Red River High School, and Spencer Heights School.

At Griffith Middle School, students feared they would lose their right to hunt after the 2012 election. This school reported 65% of its students received free or reduced lunches. Students at Red River High School and Spencer Heights School expressed the same concerns about hunting, where approximately 40% of their students received free or reduced lunches. The discussion of gun control in schools with students with a lower socioeconomic status (based on free and reduced lunches) thought President Obama was going to seize their guns and they would not be able to hunt. Students from Leesburg Middle School had the same concerns, but only 23% of those students qualified for free or reduced lunches. Many of these families possibly depended on the hunting season to provide a large portion of the food for their family. These students' families may hunt out of necessity, but also as a recreational sport due to their rural locations. Therefore, it can be assumed that preconceived notions were developed by socioeconomic status as well as geographic location. Since the research did not include teachers in an urban area, it is not known what type of discussion evolved in classrooms as a result of the 2008 or 2012 presidential elections, but likely did not include fears of losing the privilege to own a gun for hunting.

The study indicated teachers attached minimal controversy, if any, to religion, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, or 9/11. The events of 9/11 are considered recent, emotive history (Apple & Weiss, 1983; Weir, 2006), but all four of these topics had the potential to be considered open issues (Camica, 2008) since all consisted of multiple perspectives. The only controversy attached to the Holocaust by the participants was the students' preconceived notions or the choice of resources. The preponderance of participants spent little time teaching the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, or 9/11 because their courses were taught chronologically and these topics fell at the end of the year when it was time to review for the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) test. Therefore, it was not the possible controversy attached to any of these issues that deterred participants from incorporating them, but the perceived time constraints to prepare students for the high-stakes test (Meyer, 2010).

Teachers claimed any of the topics within the standards had the potential to become controversial. Many participants chose a more ambitious route and embraced controversy so students were challenged through discussions and debates. However, it was dependent on the teacher, in the role of a gatekeeper, the degree of controversy allowed and how impromptu controversial issues were addressed within the context of the classroom.

Factors that shaped discussion of controversial issues. With the risk of being superfluous, this study showed the same factors that defined a controversial issue also influenced discussion of these topics within the context of the classroom. Teachers made pedagogical decisions based on *place, experience, and standards*. To prevent the N-word² from being uttered after the 2008 presidential election, a class opener was altered to a non-verbal response. Though the N-word was not found in the students' responses, it demonstrated that language was

² The "N-word" will be used in lieu of the racially offensive term "Nigger," unless it is in a direct quote

a factor that influenced decisions of discussion. Janet, who taught 7th grade students, did not use a resource with the same offensive term because she did not want the N-word replaced with a less offensive term, such as slave or African American. She proposed the alteration devalued the source and students would not receive a realistic view of history. Very few of the participants used the N-word though the preponderance used the term “Negro” if it was in a primary source document. This research indicated that most participants were not comfortable using the N-word and there was danger students would sense teachers’ discomfort and, in return, they would become uncomfortable. A teacher’s comfort level, whether it is with her students, resources, or linguistics, influenced decisions of what was incorporated into lessons. Additionally, teachers’ decisions were based on their perceptions of support from administrators. Administrators have the ability to alleviate some of the teachers’ concerns by providing feedback of what they are willing to support as acceptable language and resources within the context of what is being studied. Additionally, support from mentors or peers can prevent a feeling of isolation and doubt for teachers who are treading into these contentious issues for the first time in their teaching career.

Teachers revealed negative responses from parents or administrators modified or stopped discussion of controversial issues in their classrooms. Controversy can arise spontaneously and participants warned that in order to provide an environment that permitted such discussion, teachers had to be well prepared. Before every lesson, teachers needed to contemplate any possible response in case discussion deviated into contentious issues. It would be assumed that willingness to discuss these issues developed with teaching experience, but that was not the case found in this research. Comfort with content knowledge and the curriculum were factors that determined if teachers embraced controversial issues whether they were elicited or evolved

through discussion. Scholars indicated novice teachers avoided controversial issues, but that was not the case in this study. The teacher who had the least teaching experience (five years) expressed he was extremely comfortable with the United States History content and curriculum. This participant, Simon, may have been the exception since he asserted he was comfortable with his content knowledge, even as a beginning teacher. Simon asserted he encouraged discussion of controversial issues in his classroom and always attempted to expose students to multiple points of view. This research revealed, however, if experienced teachers were assigned a new course to teach, they reverted to methods expected from a novice teacher. The teachers who were not comfortable with their content knowledge or curriculum purposely did not incorporate controversial issues into their classrooms and aligned their lessons strictly to the standards. As they gained more content knowledge and became more familiar with the curriculum, discussion and debate was allowed—which included controversial issues. This indicates that it is not necessarily the number of years of teaching that makes an educator willing to teach beyond the standards and incorporate controversial issues, but their comfort with the content knowledge and curriculum. If teachers are allowed to teach the same course for multiple years, it is much more likely they will encourage a higher level of learning through the incorporation of controversial issues.

Regardless of content knowledge, there were participants who refused to allow discussion of controversial issues in their classrooms and these five teachers fell into the category of Exclusive Neutrality. They adhered to the established standards and did not incorporate controversial issues into their lessons and averted them if they spontaneously arose. There were four teachers who incorporated controversial issues, but in the stance of Neutral Impartiality they did not share their own points of view on issues because they did not want to sway students to

believe as they did. Additionally, there was the perception if personal opinions were shared, students may discern there was a right or wrong stance on issues, and they could assume the teacher had the correct perspective. Three participants under the stance of Committed Impartiality used controversial issues and also purposely shared their perspectives on certain topics. This was done to give students an “educated opinion” or to “shake things up.” None of the participants admittedly fell under the stance of Exclusive Partiality where they used controversial issues to promote their own points of view on issues. None of the participants shared their religious or political ideologies with students for fear it would appear they were promoting their own agenda (Table 2).

All participants felt constrained to teach the standards within the allotted amount of time determined by their school district. Lisa and Ben allowed the standards to dictate their teaching while others, such as Simon, Mark, Neal, and Alice claimed they used them as a springboard and incorporated controversial issues into their lessons. Participants, Alice, Janet, and Neal, shared that although they embraced controversy there was still a sense pressure to cover all of the standards within the allotted time. When high-stakes testing was discussed, these participants did not appear as stressed over their scores or job security as the participants who taught strictly to the standards. All of the participants were cognizant of the importance schools placed on standards-based, high-stakes testing, but those who taught beyond the standards indicated students would become more open-minded and still perform well on the SOL test.

Table 2 – Participants’ Stances

	Exclusive Neutrality <i>Avoided CI & Taught to Standards</i>	Exclusive Partiality <i>Used CI to Promote Own POV</i>	Neutral Impartiality <i>Uses CI Did Not Share POV</i>	Committed Impartiality <i>Used CI Shared Own POV</i>
		BURCH COUNTY		
Alice 11 th				✓
Jerry 11 th				✓
Elizabeth 11 th Sp. Ed.	✓			
Neal 11 th				✓
Sharon 6 th	✓			
Emily 6 th	✓			
		DADE COUNTY		
Ben 11 th	✓			
Simon 11 th			✓	
Mark 11 th			✓	
Janet 7 th				✓
Lisa 6 th	✓			
Conrad 6 th /7 th				✓

During the interviews, the majority of the participants claimed they attempted to discuss controversial issues in their classrooms and exposed students to multiple points of view, which included inequities in life. Alice, Janet, Jerry, Mark, and Simon asserted their students were often exposed to a side of history they were unfamiliar with or one that challenged their beliefs. Since this was not observed, it is possible participants perceived they were providing multiple perspectives but it is unclear if they were including all possible ones or only those they chose to include. Even if controversial discussions were purposely planned, at times students' reactions were greater than what was anticipated, which Mark experienced during a Holocaust lesson. This serves as a lesson to all teachers that every aspect must be considered when incorporating controversial issues into the classroom. This may mean diminishing the degree of controversy attached to an issue, as Alice did, to maintain control of the classroom in order to provide a psychologically safe environment for all students.

According to the participants, preparation appeared to be the key factor when discussing controversial topics in the classroom. It is essential to prepare students from the first day of school and continue throughout the year so they can participate in discussions in respectful ways towards one another. Participants who embraced controversial issues had prepared their students for what would be studied and did not expose them to offensive language or materials until clear guidelines were established. For instance, students should understand that offensive words, such as those found when discussing race relations, could only be used within the context of what was being studied. Alice wanted her students to "question every source" and discern biases and reliability.

Even if teachers chose not to incorporate controversial issues within the context of their classrooms, it did not mean these issues would not arise. All students and classes are different,

and a teacher cannot always control what students may ask or blurt out in class. Even educators who do not want to discuss controversial issues can take precautions to avoid them, but that does not guarantee they will not crop up. If teachers are not comfortable discussing controversial issues, then they need to be prepared if they occur spontaneously. Due to past experiences, Lisa chose not to incorporate controversial issues in her lessons. However, they continued to arise spontaneously. Her method of handling these situations was to tell the students they needed to go home and ask their parents. The likelihood that those students did so was improbable because either they forgot about their question or chose not to discuss it at home. Her method to handle spontaneous issues may have resulted in lost teachable moments.

Some of the teachers who participated in this research expressed they wanted to instill values in their students, though they questioned if this was being accomplished. It was not explicitly verbalized that their goal was to inspire students to be civic-minded individuals, but the qualities they attempted to imbue in students were the same Hess (2009) claimed created civic-minded individuals. Participants indicated they wanted students to think more critically and be confident to participate in discussions. Additionally, Conrad would like for his students to:

see school as a place and actually have enough foresight that when I am done with this, I will be more prepared to behave, act, do my duties and responsibilities in society. That is the big picture I want to show them.

Neal encouraged his students “to work hard and do their homework, apply themselves.” Simon believed he had the opportunity to teach his students values through discussions and emotive images. “You cannot look at a picture of a lynching and not have a reaction to it.” He realized there could be discomfort with some of the images, but Simon wanted students to understand

“you have to look at people you don’t agree with and look at the world through their eyes . . . and understand the people that lived in that place.”

Participants asserted they attempted to do this through discussion of controversial issues, but throughout the interviews I suspected some were not actively putting into practice what they perceived they were doing in the classroom. For instance, Neal asserted he seized every opportunity to incorporate controversial issues; however, he later expressed his exasperation with his students because they would not participate in discussion. He attributed his students’ apathy to their limited exposure to other cultures due to their socioeconomic status. Regardless of his students’ lackadaisical attitude, Neal stated he attempted to instill values in them though it cannot be verified if this was done without observing him in the classroom. However, he did make a noteworthy point—inspiration is immeasurable and it could be twenty years before the students exhibited any of these traits they had gleaned from teachers’ lessons.

Research indicated students’ place and experience developed their preconceived notions and these perspectives could also be influenced by their socioeconomic status. If teachers are willing to embrace controversial topics, their place and experience will determine if or how they discuss these issues. Another factor that participants voiced, and researchers supported, was teachers must be comfortable with their content knowledge to be willing to broach controversial issues. The scholars found novice teachers would most likely be influenced by this factor; however, through the voice of the participants, this research indicated that it was not only novice teachers who faced this challenge. Experienced teachers who were teaching new content reverted to the methods of a novice teacher until they became comfortable with their content knowledge and curriculum. Regardless of a teacher’s level of comfort in the classroom, all participants indicated they had a sense of urgency cover the required material.

Though participants and scholars similarly defined controversial issues, there was a divergence beyond the basic definition. Teachers serve as gatekeepers in the classroom, but also teach and live within the school's community, and face decisions of how to manage the discussion of controversial issues within the context of their classrooms. As this research indicated, some teachers will be willing to incorporate controversial issues into classroom discussion, while others will do so reluctantly or not at all. Teachers' behaviors emanate through fear of possible negative reactions from administrators, parents, or students. A teacher's position is a precarious one when internal and external factors are woven into their decisions of addressing controversial issues in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom.

Significance of the Study

This research solidified the findings in the literature of several factors when controversial issues were discussed. The audience's preconceived notions, standards, time constraints, and support from parents and administrators were factors that influenced the discussion of controversial issues in standards-based, high-stakes testing classrooms. The literature indicated race relations, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 were the most controversial topics discussed in classrooms. Like the literature, participants in this research found teaching racial topics were steeped in controversy. This was the only topic of the primary four identified in the literature that students most likely had personally experienced or witnessed. The participants' students ranged in ages from twelve years old to eighteen years old. Their most likely avenues of learning about World War II, the Holocaust, or the Vietnam War were in schools, books, movies, or television unless they had a grandparent or great-grandparent who shared a personal account. Some of these students were not born or had just started school during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It would be possible to assume students were more cognizant of the effects of 9/11 if

they listened to the news about more recent threats or acts of terrorism. For most, post-9/11 is the only lifestyle they know since they do not remember life before the events of that day during a time of less restrictive security and reports of terrorist acts. It would be naïve to assume racism is not experienced in schools today. Therefore, it may be that race relations is more controversial in the classroom since students have most likely personally experienced or witnessed it, even within the walls of their schools. If this is true, then students can relate to tense race relations whereas they cannot do the same with the Holocaust, Vietnam War, or 9/11.

Participants asserted anything within the standards had the potential to be controversial, but there was often more controversy attached to the way a topic was taught rather than the topic itself. Alice shared that she taught the Age of Exploration in a more controversial manner that surprised her students when she painted a “more realistic picture of Columbus.” She was one of the strongest proponents for teaching controversial issues, but what she promoted may not have always been demonstrated in her classroom. A few participants, including Alice, found the election of President Obama had the potential to create controversy. The true response of the election in Alice’s classroom was not as luminous as it could have been since she altered her lesson and had students respond silently to the historic event of electing our first black president. Alice asserted during our interviews that she embraced controversial issues at every opportunity, but also shared the modification of a class opener regarding the students’ response to Obama’s election. Therefore, there was a discrepancy between what Alice perceived she was doing in the classroom and what she actually did when an issue may have been too controversial for her comfort. In fact, the purpose of the class opener was not clear since it was never discussed with students although it did provide a lens into the students’ mindset regarding the election. This does provide evidence that rather than risking a possible animated discussion, Alice chose a safer

route. At least Alice's students had the opportunity express their feelings unlike Lisa's students, who were instructed to discuss the election with their parents and avoided the topic altogether.

Both Alice and Neal asserted they attempted to "shake things up" with their use of language for "shock value." The evidence provided by the participants, especially Alice and Neal, did not provide substantial proof that though they possibly had the power to make anything within the standards controversial, they did not seize every opportunity to do so. It appeared Simon and Janet used graphic images to stir emotions and create controversy when teaching about slavery or the Civil Rights Movement, based on the samples they provided for this research.

The literature indicated students benefited from discussion of controversial issues in the classroom, but the research cannot confirm this. Hess (2004, 2009) is a strong proponent that discussion of controversial issues will build skills of critical analysis, teach students to discuss and debate issues, develop the art of compromise, all of which prepare students for full citizenry. After this research, the significance of what Hess (2004, 2009) proposed actually being done in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom in the area of this research is questionable. That is not to say it cannot be done, but sufficient evidence could not be found simply through interviews.

The literature recommended educators should be trained to successfully incorporate controversial issues into their classrooms and asserted it was a shortcoming of universities because this was not being done. Ben was the only participant who blamed his university for a lack of preparedness in the classroom, but those who asserted they embraced controversial issues stressed proper planning was the ultimate key in handling controversial issues. Whether teachers planned to incorporate controversial issues or not, they needed to be prepared if controversy

spontaneously arose in the classroom. It was essential that teachers considered every possible scenario where a topic could segue into contentious areas and methods needed to be in place to diffuse an unwanted situation. If teachers chose to incorporate controversial issues into their teaching, they needed to establish expectations with students from the first day of school.

The literature provided a plethora of information regarding the incorporation of controversial issues. Just as it was found in the literature, participants who had a negative experience with parents or administrators or felt they did not have administrative support would not discuss controversial issues. The literature indicated controversial issues could be discussed in a psychologically safe environment (Baker, 2004), but many chose the less controversial route out of fear that they would place their students in psychological danger. A parent, who was also an administrator, confronted Lisa about one of her lessons on slavery. This experience changed the way Lisa taught and she indicated she became very cautious to avoid situations that would offend any of her students. Lisa did not want to be “the teacher who gave that child a scar, being 40 years old and they remember sixth grade when they felt singled out because of their color and it was my fault. I don’t ever want to be that teacher.”

In the literature it was indicated that novice teachers avoided controversial issues, but the research indicated a gap in the literature. The disparity between the literature and the research indicated novice teachers avoided contentious issues, however, experienced teachers who were not comfortable with their content knowledge or curriculum reverted to the practices expected of a beginning teacher, avoided controversial issues, and used the standards as their guide to teaching. A consensus could not be drawn regarding skills of citizenship when the research was compared to the literature. Scholars have studied the benefits of controversial issues being discussed to promote civic-mindedness and claimed it was beneficial. Due to the length of this

particular research, it cannot be confirmed or denied if teachers contributed to developing civic-minded individuals. Development of citizenry is not quantitative and students would have to be part of a research for many years, as well as their current and future teachers, to determine if this was possible or not—if it could be then.

Implications for Practice

This research revealed teachers often avoided controversial issues if they were not comfortable with the content (Hendrix, 1981; Hess, 2009). To increase a teacher's level of comfort, professional development workshops on strategies to broach controversial issues need to be available (Landsman and Lewis, 2006). This could be done for pre-service teachers through their universities or through school districts for currently employed teachers. Whether it is at the district or school level, administrators need to make decisions and choose to either promote or dissuade teachers from discussing controversial issues within their classrooms. If clear guidelines are established of what is acceptable, teachers can make classroom decisions knowing they will have the support of their administrators. This may simply mean a teacher needs to openly discuss, with her building principal, controversial material she may want to use, such as primary sources, images, or videos to understand if she will be supported if a complaint was voiced. Before discussing these issues with administrators, teachers need to educate themselves on the incorporation of controversial issues. There are professional development workshops, articles, and books available to guide teachers to successfully incorporate controversial issues or materials into their classrooms. Teachers beginning this process would also benefit from mentors who are comfortable with the incorporation of controversial issues in their own classroom as well as focus groups of peers who are attempting to do the same.

There is no single way to teach controversial topics and as curriculum gatekeepers, it is a decision that must ultimately be made by educators (Thornton, 2005) and one that will be based on previous classroom experiences (Kruger, 2012). Hess (2004, 2009) proposes the incorporation of controversial issues into classrooms will benefit our community and create civic-minded individuals if students are exposed to various perspectives on issues. Unfortunately, that does not mean it is being put into practice in our classrooms, but Hand and Levinson (2012) propose the facilitation of discussion is vital to nourish students' understanding of issues.

If teachers want to embrace the discussion of controversial issues within their classrooms, or if they are not comfortable with their content or curriculum, then professional development will be beneficial. This can be done locally or teachers can be encouraged to attend summer workshops. Most summer teacher workshops have the goal to converge teachers from diverse backgrounds for richer discussion of issues, provide resources and develop lesson plans for their classrooms. For example, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Gilder-Lehrman Institute, and the Library of Congress are just a few of many organizations that offer professional development that often include controversial subjects that can increase teachers' content knowledge and comfort level of issues, provide assistance with decisions on linguistics, as well as lesson plans and resources. These professional development activities have the potential to be extremely beneficial, but it would also be advantageous for facilitators and attendees to maintain contact after the event to understand how the information gleaned from their professional development translates into classrooms. Not only would this provide rich information for research, but would be beneficial for the professional development attendees.

It is also recommended that schools provide training for teachers throughout the year to increase their comfort level with their content (Hendrix, 1981; Hess, 2009), the curriculum, and

controversial issues. This can be done through Professional Learning Communities or district level professional development using case studies, lesson ideas, methods of incorporating current events, strategy sessions, and resources to challenge students, but yet make their teachers' first year with a new content less stressful because there is a support system. Teachers can learn a variety of techniques to encourage discussion of these topics (Burkstrand-Reid, Carbone, and Hendricks, 2011). The literature in this research provided benefits of incorporating controversial issues within the context of the classroom and there are books to assist teachers with challenges they may encounter (Claire & Holden, 2007). Reproducible lessons are available that include topics and accompanying questions that will ease the transition into teaching controversial issues (Roth & Aberson, 2007). These resources will provide a bridge into the discussion of controversial issues until teachers become confident with their more dangerous teaching (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999).

Regardless of the resources and support available, there are teachers who resist change and will not want to incorporate controversial issues into their classrooms. This may be a result of their own preconceived notions and experiences, but if they are exposed to this method of teaching it will still be beneficial for them to understand which stance (Washington & Humphries, 2011) they choose and why. It is possible that once they examine their teaching through another lens and understand the impact of their classroom decisions, even those who thought they would never change the way they teach can slowly start to embrace ways to create more meaningful learning for their students, which can include the incorporation of controversial issues.

Strategies for Implementation

In an effort to make this research more practical for secondary level United States teachers, specific metacognitive strategies will be discussed for classroom use. These strategies can be used on practically any topic discussed in United States History. Teachers, in the role of gatekeepers, can choose the level of controversy used in these strategies. The incorporation of controversial issues have been recommended as a result of this research, but rather than focus on teaching controversial issues, it important to remember skills of critical thinking can be learned in less controversial classrooms as well.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, rather than using convenience sampling, I recommend expansion of the research base to include more schools in culturally diverse regions, including urban schools. From my study, I learned which issues the participants deemed controversial as well as factors that influenced incorporation of these topics in their classrooms. However, the factors that influenced teachers may be different in an urban, more diverse school than the predominantly homogeneous rural schools used in this research.

The factors that made issues controversial as well as how they influenced participants' teaching were the audience and their preconceived notions. I suspect these factors influenced teachers' methods of teaching and I would recommend classroom observations, in addition to the interviews, be done to ascertain how teachers approach controversial issues and which strategies they implement to avoid potential problems.

Continued research of the incorporation of controversial issues into secondary level United States History classes would be beneficial. This study was focused on the views of secondary level teachers, but I recommend the scope of the study needs to be extended. It would

be pragmatic to include professors of university teacher preparation programs, school administrators, and students to gain a conglomeration of how controversial issues can be incorporated for the betterment of our students and empower teachers' to teach beyond the standards.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this research I sought to learn what caused an issue to be controversial and factors that made an educator willing to teach them. At the end of this research I must ask: So, what if teachers do not incorporate controversial issues into lessons? If the standards are used as a teaching bible, then most students will pass the standards-based, high-stakes test—if that is the ultimate goal. After all, for years students learned history by drill and kill before differentiated instruction, big ideas, and teaching skills of critical analysis came to the forefront. Many of these students went on to be successful or contributing members of society—others did not. If history teachers are expected to create civic-minded individuals to make educated decisions in society, Hess (2009) proposes this needs to be done with controversial issues. We have good citizens in our society, but cannot verify this was done solely through exposure to controversial issues in school. The problem is that the skills we are attempting to teach are not tangible. Teachers complained we live in a country where schools are obsessed with data and students' knowledge is based on standards-based, high-stakes testing. If the benefits of incorporating controversial issues cannot be immediately measured, teachers may not be willing to take the risk to incorporate them into their classes with all the other demands placed on them. Admittedly, I am a proponent of controversial issues in the classroom. I want students to look forward to learning about history, which is more likely if they are interested in the topics and engaged in class. Students need to see the big picture of how events are intertwined and our

lives are influenced by what occurred in the past. Students need to learn we can disagree with one another, still be respectful, and know their voices can make a difference. Perhaps students will realize it was often the common person who made a difference in our history and they, too, can follow Gandhi's words and realize "You must be the change you wish to see in the world" (Wildmind, 2006).

Within this paper was a quote by Dewey (1922) that is still relevant over ninety years later:

Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Not that it always effects [*sic*] this result; but that conflict is a *sine qua non* of reflection and ingenuity. (p. 300)

Conflict can be an annoyance for some and provoke uncomfortable discussions, but can evoke reactions. This may not lead to skills to forge the ideal citizen for the future, but it is worth the effort if educators teach students to think more critically to live as an educated individual in our democracy.

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Appendix A

Interview Frame for Teachers

This will be a single interview for the study:

*Pseudonym Assignment: _____

Demographic Information:

Name: _____

Ethnic Identity (Race): _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Current Employer: _____

Current Teaching Assignment: _____

What institutions of higher learning have you attended as a student?

What degrees were you awarded?

Please list your areas of endorsement on your teaching certificate.

Interview Questions

Background

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your background, such as where you grew up, how you came to be in this area?
2. How long you have been a history and social science teacher?
3. Why did you want to become a history and social science teacher?
4. Please describe to me the similarities and differences between your high school United States History class and the one you teach.
5. Please describe your teaching career—such as which classes have you taught that you enjoyed or did not enjoy teaching?
6. Tell me about your feelings toward the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Standards of Learning and high-stakes test.
7. How have your students typically performed on the SOL test?

Current Teaching Practices

8. Which United States History classes do you teach (standard, honor, AP)?

9. If you teach different types of United States History classes (standard, honors, AP), how do you teach them differently?
10. How do you teach the same type of United States History class (standard, honor, AP) differently based on the make-up of your students?
11. Please explain the way you cover the standards. Do you “teach to the test” or do you go beyond the required essential knowledge?

Identifying Controversial Issues

12. How do you define a controversial issue?
13. How do you feel about incorporating controversial issues in classrooms, whether it is history, English, or science?
14. Prior to this interview, I gave you a list of the United States History Standards. Do you find any of the topics within the standards to be controversial? Which ones? Why?
15. Which standards listed in the essential knowledge do you think has the potential to be controversial, but can also be taught in a non-controversial manner?
 - a. Can you discuss some issues that have been discussed in your classroom that are not part of the standards?
16. Tell me how/if you think it is possible for issues to be more controversial because of the topic itself or because of the way they are taught?
 - a. Can you explain and give me examples?
17. Which topics will you not consider discussing in your United States History classroom?
 - a. Have they ever been discussed in your classroom?
 - b. How did they come up?
 - c. How did you handle the situation?

- d. Why will you not allow these topics in your class?

Controversial Issues and Teaching

18. How do you teach a lesson that includes controversial issues in a standards-based, high-stakes testing classroom differently than you do a non-controversial issue?
 - a. How do you handle your own points of view on issues?
 - b. How did you develop methods for discussing the issues?
 - c. Can you give me examples of successes and mishaps?
19. How often do you incorporate current events into your lessons?
 - a. How does this create controversy?
 - b. How do you connect current events to the students' study of history?
20. Before discussing controversial issues, how do you discuss it with your principal?
21. How are your resources different for a lesson that includes controversial issues versus one that is not?
 - a. Where do you find your resources?
 - b. Which resources do you prefer?
 - c. Which resources will you not use and why?
22. Why do you think you are or are not comfortable discussing controversial issues in your classroom?
23. Have you observed or talked with other United States History teachers to know how they handle the discussion of controversial issues?
 - a. Can you share some success stories or mishaps?
24. How do you think the discussion of controversial issues in your classes could be a benefit or detriment to your students?

- a. Do you think these issues help develop students into civic-minded individuals?
 - b. Which issues have you found to have the potential to be both?
25. If you have discussed controversial issues, how did your students handle the topic?
- a. What type of students handled it better than others?
 - b. Discuss how their preconceived notions about the topic influenced classroom discussion.
26. Please tell me about a mishap or an a-ha moment when discussing controversial issues.
- a. Were there any repercussions?
 - b. What kind of responses have you had from students?
 - i. How did you prepare students to discuss controversial issues?
 - c. What kind of responses have you had from parents?
 - i. Were parents aware that you would be discussing controversial issues?
 - ii. How did you notify parents?
 - iii. How did parents respond?
 - d. What kind of responses have you had from administrators?
27. What do you want your students to take away from their studies of United States History with you?
28. What would you like to add that we did not discuss?

Appendix B

School Districts

Burch County School District

Burch County has a population of 54,842 and 82.6% of the residents earned a high school diploma or higher. The median household income is \$45,991 with 13.7% of the population living below the poverty level. There are eight secondary level schools in the Burch County School District. United States History: 1865 to Present is taught in 6th grade and the district's Standard of Learning (SOL) passage rate is 83%, which is very close to the state's average of 84%. The Virginia and United States History course is taught in the 11th grade and the district and state SOL passage rates are equal at 85%. In Dade County, United States History to 1865 is taught in the 6th grade and the SOL passage rate for the district is 79%, which is slightly below the state average of 81%. United States History: 1865 to Present is taught in the 7th grade and the SOL passage rate for the district is 81%, which is below the state average of 84%.

Three participants (Neal, Emily, Sharon) teach at Spencer Heights School, located in a small town in Burch County. It includes 6th through 12th grades and has 741 students. Red River High School where three participants (Alice, Jerry, Elizabeth) teach is also in Burch County. The school is located within a small town, which is the county's seat. The school has 9th through 12th grades with 888 students.

Both of these schools have gone through a significant transformation within the past two years with a change in administration. Red River High School had personnel and student disciplinary issues and the principal of Spencer Heights School was transferred to Red River High School. The teachers' morale at Red River High School has improved exponentially, but has decreased significantly at Spencer Heights School. At the end of the 2011-2012 academic

year, several faculty members either resigned from Spencer Heights School or transferred to Red River High School.

Dade County School District

Dade County has a population of 94,392 residents and 82.9% have a minimum of a high school diploma. The median household income is \$44,231 with 23.6% of its population living below the poverty level. Dade County School District consists of nine secondary level schools. United States History to 1865 is taught in the 6th grade and the district's SOL passage rate is 79%, which is slightly below the state's average of 81%. United States History: 1865 to Present is taught in 7th grade and the district's SOL passage rate is 81% and the state's average is 81%. Both Virginia and United States History and Advanced Placement United States History are taught in the 11th grade. Advanced Placement students are not required to take the SOL test if they complete the Advanced Placement Exam and score a three or higher. For Virginia and United States History, the district's SOL passage rate is 78%, which is below the state passage rate of 85%.

Three participants (Simon, Mark, Ben) teach at Leesburg High School, located in a small university town in Dade County. It includes 9th through 12th grades and has 1,090 students. Two participants (Janet, Lisa) teach at Leesburg Middle School, which includes 6th through 8th grades and has 826 students. One participant (Conrad) teaches at Griffith Middle School, which is in a rural part of Dade County. It has a student population of 219 and includes 6th through 8th grades.

Appendix C

SOL Scores

Teacher	School	Course	Teacher SOL	School SOL	District SOL	State SOL
Alice	Red River High School (Burch)	AP US History Virginia & US History	N/A			
			95%	83%	83%	85%
Jerry	Red River High School (Burch)	Virginia & US History	88%	83%	85%	85%
Elizabeth	Red River High School (Burch)	Virginia & US History (Sp. Ed.)	88%	83%	85%	85%
Neal	Spencer Heights School (Burch)	Virginia & US History	90%	90%	85%	85%
Emily	Spencer Heights School (Burch)	US 1865 to Present	90%	71%	83%	84%
Sharon	Spencer Heights School	US 1865 to Present	60%	71%	83%	84%
Conrad	Griffith Middle School (Dade)	US History To 1865 US History to 1865	N/A	68%	79%	81%
				79%	81%	84%
Janet	Leesburg Middle School (Dade)	US History 1865 to Present	95%	85%	81%	84%
Lisa	Leesburg Middle School (Dade)	US History to 1865	85%	87%	79%	81%
Simon	Leesburg High School (Dade)	AP US History	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mark	Leesburg High School (Dade)	Virginia and US History	93%	85%	78%	85%
Ben	Leesburg High School (Dade)	Advanced Placement US Virginia & US	90%	85%	78%	85%

Appendix D

Scholars' Definitions of Controversial Issues

