

CIVIC AND MORAL VOICES IN YOUNG AMERICANS' COMMEMORATIVE  
NARRATIVES OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

by

AERI SONG

(Under the Direction of Jennifer Hauver)

ABSTRACT

By conducting photo elicitation interviews with twenty-seven U.S. high school students, this dissertation study explores what aspects of Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) and the Civil Rights movement the students thought were important to commemorate on MLK Day, and why they thought so. Students in this study attempted to add more diversity and complexity to the simplistic version of the Civil Rights story that they had already heard by including a wide range of people for whom MLK advocated and who joined the Civil Rights movement. Yet, there were variations in students' ideas about who should be included as well as in their intentions for making such inclusions. In addition, while all students acknowledged the importance of presenting MLK's achievements and the unity of protesters, not all students chose to include the episodes of struggle and violence. In justifying their embrace of the dark side of the Civil Rights story, Black students' voices were more civic than moral in that they described the struggle as a process of democratic social change. Meanwhile, some Asian, Hispanic, and White students used mainly moral voices, focusing on the suffering of the victims.

The key findings of this study imply that students' identities can help explain many of the differences in their reactions to multi-dimensional aspects of MLK/the Civil Rights movement, whereas some of the differences can be considered to stem from individual rather than group characteristics, according to an individual's exposure to different discourses. Furthermore, the findings regarding students' tactical intentions of including diverse actors encourage researchers to see students' ideas as evolving in a particular context rather than remaining static or unidimensional. I also suggest that although it seems almost impossible to satisfy diverse students' different learning needs, educators can gain from this dissertation meaningful insights into how the curriculum can be more inclusive and relevant to students' lives as well as more ethical. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that educators reflect on their representations of racial violence committed during the Civil Rights movement from the perspectives of students, particularly of Black students.

INDEX WORDS: Martin Luther King Jr.; Civil Rights movement; Commemorative narrative; Remembrance; National identity; Racial identity; Ethnic identity; Socio-economic identity; Student perspective; Affective reaction; Civic voice; Moral voice; Photo elicitation interview; U.S. high school students

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AERI SONG

B.A., Seoul National University, Republic of Korea, 2004

M.A., Seoul National University, Republic of Korea, 2010

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2019

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AERI SONG

Major Professor: Jennifer Hauver

Committee: Joseph Tobin

Kyunghwa Lee

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2019

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

It has been a long journey to complete this dissertation study. During the last five years of my doctoral journey, I was often doubtful about myself and was tempted to give up in the middle. Without the support and encouragement of many people, I could have not finished this journey.

I first acknowledge the twenty-seven participating students whose voices so beautifully fill the pages of this dissertation. I deeply appreciate their willingness to share their thoughts and feelings and the trust that they have shown to me, a cultural outsider. I also appreciate the social studies teachers who opened their classrooms so that I could meet these wonderful participants.

I cannot express how blessed I feel to have Dr. Jennifer Hauver as my academic advisor. As a sincere scholar, she has demonstrated what it means to be genuine and reflexive in researching and mentoring. I was touched by her sustained support for my study as well as her warm care for me as a person, particularly when I was in a difficult time. I also truly appreciate her believing in my potential. And I will never forget our intense communication in the summer of 2019 for revision of this dissertation, which will have a lasting impact on my life as an educational researcher.

I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Joseph Tobin and Dr. Kyunghwa Lee. I am very fortunate and blessed to have them as my committee members. I greatly appreciate Dr. Tobin for encouraging me to approach this dissertation study with more sympathy and humility towards my research participants. And I owe Dr. Lee so much. I am truly thankful for her sincere advice that I will always keep in mind as I live in the academic world. She also inspired me to see my research participants as residing in a specific here and now. Thank you!

I also would like to acknowledge my colleagues who have been my inspiration and encouragement throughout my doctoral study. I especially offer my appreciation to Seung-eun Jung, Xiaoying Zhao, Shara Cherniak, and Jessica Kobe. As a distance learner, I sometime felt lonely and isolated. Whenever I needed someone to talk to about my study, they were willing to have the time to listen to me. I sincerely appreciate their friendship and thoughtful comments.

Special thanks to Wesley Price who has been a great tutor and editor during my doctoral journey although he was not able to accompany me until the last moment due to his mission trip. I am also thankful to Nancy Heiges for her help in the process of writing and revising my dissertation.

Another special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Sohn. I am grateful to God for introducing them into my family as caregivers for my son. Thanks to them, I was able to concentrate on studying. I can't express the depth of my appreciation for the love and care they have given my son.

I am so grateful for my family members. Thanks to the tremendous sacrifice of my husband, I was able to continue to study. I am thankful and sorry to my two-year old son, who has patiently endured the absence of his mom. I am also greatly indebted to my mom and dad for their endless love for and trust in me. And my only sister, I truly appreciate her consistent encouragement and prayers for me. I love you all so much!

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my God who has been the source of strength and wisdom throughout my entire life, particularly during my doctoral journey. When I embarked on this journey, God gave me the message of peace and reconciliation through two Bible verses. I hope this dissertation study answers His calling.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We cannot remember everything that happened to us when we were young. As we grow, we come to have only a partial memory of our younger days. In such partial memory, there remain our loved ones and our happiest moments; yet, we also remember some bitter experiences from our childhood. Similarly, our memory of our nation's past consists of selective events and people. However, unlike our memory of childhood, our memory of our nation's past is made up of many elements that we did not directly experience. Instead, we learned them from our social others and through our social environment.

This dissertation study pays attention to young Americans' memory of Martin Luther King Jr. (henceforth referred to as MLK), whom they chose as the most famous historical figure in the U.S. (Wineburg & Monte-Sano, 2008). As Americans grow, they come to have a memory of MLK through the school curriculum as well as through "the cultural curriculum" (Wineburg et al., 2007, p. 69). Not only textbooks but also children's books, films (e.g., *Selma*), and museum exhibitions teach them about his legacy. Creators of such materials or events consciously or unconsciously come to play an important role in shaping students' partial memory of MLK. The involvement of the authors' selectivity and personal interpretations in representing MLK's thoughts and actions is inevitable. However, the consistency of these narratives can blind students to certain aspects of MLK's life, which become susceptible to distortion. One may wonder why students' memory of MLK matters so much. It is true that students cannot and do not need to know every detail about any historical figure; however, students' memory of MLK

matters because “he is a widely recognized figure in American history whose image has come to epitomize ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom in America” (Alridge, 2006, p. 664).

### **Why Martin Luther King Jr.?**

Because of MLK’s unique status as a national symbol, some scholars have explored how MLK has been canonized in American society as a way to impose national values (Bruyneel, 2014; McDonald, 2015; Walker, 2013). This process of canonization is discursive because of changing and competing definitions of national values (McDonald, 2015; Harding, 1987). Yet, through this discursive process, an official narrative honoring MLK has gradually formed. According to McDonald, the first proponents of MLK Day had to negotiate an image of MLK that would garner public support:

Though many remained committed to King’s ideas regarding economic justice and pacifism, they primarily used King’s civil rights work as the evidence of his worthiness for such a national honor and recast King as the symbol of America finally overcoming its greatest sin. (p. 33)

This way of honoring MLK was also reflected in the National King Memorial. McDonald explains:

King’s ideals and values exalted in the King Memorial (democracy, justice and hope) align with the way the nation chooses or wishes to see its own self. The absence of other values, such as King’s tripartite commitment to absolute nonviolence, antiracism, and economic justice, thus become all the more telling. (p. 32)

While acknowledging the existence of the official commemorative narrative of MLK, McDonald (2015) argues that “King’s legacy remains contested today” (p. 33). As an example, McDonald references President Obama’s speech at the MLK Memorial’s dedication ceremony, in which he “celebrated King’s legacy and the symbolic meaning of the memorial while also reclaiming King’s commitment to economic justice” (p. 32).

Table 1

*Martin Luther King Jr. in the Social Studies Georgia Standards of Excellence (2006)*

| Index   | Standards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SSKH1   | Identify the national holidays and describe the people and/or events celebrated.<br>e. <b>Martin Luther King Jr. Day</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| SS2H1   | Describe the lives and contributions of historical figures in Georgia history.<br>d. <b>Martin Luther King Jr.</b> (civil rights)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| SS5H6   | Describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950-1975.<br>b. Explain the key events and people of the Civic Rights movement: ...and <b>Martin Luther King Jr</b><br>c. Describe the impact on American society of the assassinations of ...and <b>Martin Luther King Jr.</b>                                                              |
| SS8H11  | Evaluate the role of Georgia in the modern Civil Rights movement.<br>b. Describe the role of individuals ( <b>Martin Luther King Jr.</b> and John Lewis), groups (SNCC and SCLC) and events (Albany Movement and March on Washington) in the Civil Rights movement.                                                                                                   |
| SSUSH21 | Analyze U.S. international and domestic policies including their influences on technological advancements and social changes during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations<br>d. Investigate the growth, influence, and tactics of civil rights groups, <b>Martin Luther King Jr</b> , the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the I Have a Dream Speech, and Cesar Chavez. |

MLK holds a unique place in social studies education, just as he does in the larger society. First, MLK is one of only a few historical figures who serves double duty: symbolizing

national values and representing positive character traits (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Teachers expect their students not only to learn about MLK's significant role in changing the nation's race relations, but also to learn from his admirable character. According to Barton and Lestik, teachers even expect that students' admiration of MLK's character will turn to "imitation" (2004, p. 103). Second, MLK is ubiquitous in social studies classes. Students learn about him from Kindergarten to 11<sup>th</sup> grade, as shown in Table 1. Although as students advance to higher grades, the social studies curriculum addresses more concrete historical sources such as the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the curriculum primarily focuses on his role in the Civil Rights movement, which reflects the official narrative of MLK in the larger society. Third, the description of MLK is interestingly consistent across U.S. history textbooks written by different authors. According to Kim (1993), timelines about MLK in middle school texts include almost exactly the same events: "the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, the 1963 March on Washington, the 1965 Selma movement, and the 1968 assassination" (Kim, p. 16). Kim also notes that textbooks put emphasis on the same ideas and values in presenting MLK's life, such as "nonviolence, passive resistance, civil disobedience, nonviolent protests, and resisting injustice" (Kim, 1993, p. 19). Lastly, MLK serves as a "new Black civic role model" (Binnerkade, 2016, p. 266). Based on the historiography of U.S. textbooks, Binnerkade (2016) suggests:

Through the Civil Rights movement Narrative of the last forty years, students got to know "good" Black people predominantly as non-violent activists and heroes, a modern version of earlier stereotypical depictions of Black men. Malcom X's narrative function is to serve as a counterweight to emphasize the positive aspects of the first group; the stories about him and the demands he verbalized, the Black Panthers, and other groups are not given space. As such, in the textbook

narratives, Black people's image changed from trouble makers to a positive force that contributed to the democratic development of the U.S.A. Thanks to this shift, linguistically and culturally the Civil Rights movement story could now be told from a 'we' perspective and subsequently be turned into national heritage. (p. 265).

Taken together, it is clear that the status of MLK is different from that of other historical figures introduced in the social studies curriculum. In American society, the curriculum on MLK and the Civil Rights movement functions as "a means of imparting civic education" (Neumann, 2018, p. 46) and shaping shared social and moral values, as well as promoting national identification.

Given the politics of collective memory of MLK and the significant role of educational institutions in "mnemonic socialization" (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 284), it is not surprising that some have criticized the social studies curriculum for its deficiency in representing MLK. This critique has often mirrored the arguments of scholars positioned on the political left regarding MLK's legacy (e.g., criticism of the omission of the Poor People's Campaign); however, such criticism has essentially been driven by concern for students rather than by political ideology. Based on an analysis of intermediate U.S. history curriculum materials, Kim (1993) suggests:

Since textbooks focus heavily on events, speeches, and concepts related to King's life from 1954 to 1965, curriculum resources neglect to address the events of his later years. This causes an imbalance in curriculum resources which should deal with his whole life and not merely one part. Stuck in time, King seemingly remains a unidimensional figure in our past, where we see him seldom growing or evolving beyond specific events, speeches, or concepts. (p. 21)



Kim further points out that “[m]ost notably absent from all these curriculum resources are any discussions about King’s concern over Vietnam and economic issues” (p. 23). While acknowledging the mere omission of these issues from the curriculum does not justify the inclusion of them, Kim stresses that educators must understand that “Vietnam and poverty consumed the passions of King’s soul” (p. 23) and provide a more accurate portrayal of King “as a complex person with an expanding vision for America” (p. 25).

Meanwhile, Alridge (2006) points out the limitations of the heroic and celebratory master narratives that hinder a critical representation of MLK in American history textbooks. According to Alridge, MLK is mainly narrated as a messiah for African Americans, an embodiment of the Civil Rights movement, and a moderate; taken together, the three master narratives of MLK “offer a sanitized, noncontroversial, oversimplified view of perhaps one of America’s most radical and controversial leaders” (p. 680). Alridge further explains:

They hide King’s humanity, submerging his struggles and weaknesses and the depth of his ideas. They paint a picture of the Civil Rights movement as a period far removed from the present, disconnected from contemporary problems of racism, discrimination, and poverty in American society. As a result, students are denied an opportunity to see King’s true message and its relevance to poverty, discrimination, and global conflict today. (p. 680).

In critiquing the misrepresentation of MLK in the textbooks, Alridge laments the missed learning opportunity for students to develop “a conceptual lens that would help them better comprehend the world around them” (p. 680).

More recently, Neumann (2018) provides a fresh critique by noting curricular ignorance of MLK’s religion. Based on his review of more than 40 curriculum materials drawn from three

sites that can claim to be “national keepers of King’s legacy” (p. 46), the materials all describe MLK as a secular leader rather than as a religious leader. According to Neumann, the curriculum materials collectively “give little attention to the ideology of the Civil Rights movement—which seems problematic in its own right—and even less to religious ideas.” Neumann notes although the materials present MLK’s speeches and writings containing biblical messages, the materials fail to teach about the religious aspects of MLK’s ideas. Instead, they mainly engage students in the practice of analyzing rhetorical strategies in texts. While admitting the educational benefits of such instructional strategies, Neumann points out that “focusing solely on the mechanics of King’s skilled biblical intertextuality can deflect attention from the theological content of the language” (p. 47).

From Neumann’s perspective, “secularizing King risks fundamentally misrepresenting his identity, his ideology, and his motivation for nonviolence” (p. 46) because his principle of nonviolence is grounded in the biblical value *agape* and his famous dream for the beloved community is “the realization of divine love in lived social relations” (p. 47). Neumann further suggests that the lack of attention to King’s religion also dilutes the significant role of religion in the Civil Rights movement because “the ethos of the movement among much of the early leadership was deeply imbued with Christian ideas” (Neumann, 2018, p. 47).

As one of the factors that could explain curricular ignorance of MLK’s religion, Neumann points to authoritative curriculum documents. According to Neumann, “[e]ncouraged by state curriculum documents, many teachers approach King in the same way as the Washington, DC, King Memorial: as a means of imparting civic education” (p. 46). Neumann also sympathizes with teachers who might fear introducing religion into the classroom.

Nonetheless, Neumann argues that “minimizing or avoiding the role of religion in American and world history is obviously an inadequate solution to a very real challenge” (p. 46).

### **Why Students’ Voices?**

This line of study provides educators with ample opportunity to consider the potentially negative consequences of deficiencies in the MLK curriculum. I situate my study in these scholarly conversations yet distinguish it from previous studies by listening to students’ voices on the representations of MLK. While previous studies have helped educators view the MLK curriculum critically from multiple perspectives, they commonly lack students’ perspectives. The absence of students’ voices in the previous studies is understandable because a critique of the MLK curriculum requires a comprehensive historical knowledge of MLK’s life as well as the Civil Rights era. Students are likely less knowledgeable about such historical information than educational researchers. However, high school juniors or seniors (the participants in this study) do have expertise on the MLK curriculum based on their cumulative school experiences of 10 years or more. Indeed, some students in the present study demonstrated a critical understanding of their educational institution’s representation of MLK and the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, this dissertation aims to guide readers in listening to and learning from students’ voices.

The present study resembles curriculum criticism. Curriculum criticism, rooted in aesthetic criticism and social anthropology, intends to help others perceive and understand educational phenomena more fully. By viewing the work of curriculum critics as a combination of art and science, curriculum criticism distinguishes itself from the technical analysis of curriculum, which involves “evaluation of the match between intended outcomes and conditioned means for achieving outcomes” (Ross, 1998, p. 162).

Meanwhile, the present study also has some features which distinguish it from the scholarship of curriculum criticism. The most distinctive feature is that the present study pursues neither intrinsic appraisal nor extrinsic appraisal. Although curriculum critics generally avoid technical evaluation of the curriculum, they often appraise the quality of the curriculum, employing two types of criteria: “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” (Ross, 1998, p. 166). According to Ross (1998), “[i]n intrinsic appraisal the stated aims of the teacher (principal, textbooks, author, etc.) are accepted as valid and the critic judges whether these aims were met” (p. 167). Meanwhile, “[e]xtrinsic appraisal compares the aims of the teacher to some external criteria” (Ross, 1998, p. 167). Some external criteria include “the researcher’s knowledge of the children and their abilities” and “educational, social, and political theory” (p. 167). The approach of the present study is closer to extrinsic appraisal in that it questions the predetermined aims of the curriculum. However, my study differs in that I relied primarily on students in identifying the potential problems in the curriculum. Unlike curriculum critics, I used my own knowledge and theories to make sense of how students interpret and represent a given topic as well as what students think about schools’ representations of the topic. The biggest strength of my approach was that it enabled multivocal critiques to thrive. Although curriculum criticism emphasizes open-mindedness—for, example, researchers are encouraged to let “the observed phenomenon” determine “the focus of observations and of the resultant criticism” (Ross, 1998, p. 164), the research is inevitably driven by the researchers’ perspectives or the researchers’ preferred theory or the popular frameworks for criticism in a given discipline; therefore, it is likely that the criticism becomes more univocal. For example, the previous criticism of the commemoration of or the representation of MLK (by sociologists studying collective memory, historians, or

educational researchers) could overshadow the criticism of the MLK curriculum. The present study intended to overcome such limitations by using students' expertise and experience.

There are some studies that have examined students' ideas on MLK and the Civil Rights movement. Previous studies show us students' agreement about the historical significance of MLK and the Civil Rights movement and some racial differences in their interpretations of the figure and the event (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 1998, 2010; Wineburg & Monte-Sano, 2008). However, the findings of the studies are commonly bounded by students' previous knowledge of the content, no matter whether their knowledge reflects official or vernacular narratives. The present study is intended to overcome such limitations by examining students' ideas after providing them with some multi-dimensional aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights movement. In addition, this study aims to listen to the multiple voices of U.S. high school students from racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse backgrounds, so that it can expand the previous studies that mainly looked at racial differences in students' ideas on such content.

### **Why Photo Elicitation?**

According to Harper (2002), "photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (p. 13). Barton (2015) describes the strength of photo elicitation by noting that it makes interview participants feel comfortable and less threatened. According to Barton, photo elicitation is particularly useful for producing rich data when the topics of the interviews contain abstract concepts, controversial issues, or topics that are rarely discussed in daily conversation. I considered these features of photo elicitation when I chose photo elicitation interviews as my research method. However, there were other, more particular reasons for my methodological choice. First, I paid attention to the fact that a photograph is a site

of memory. Photographs are one of “the major modern sites of social memory” (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 293) because they are great at visually capturing the past and transmitting the memory of the past to the next generation. Thus, in the present study, photographs played an important role in reminding students of their memories of MLK as well as of their school experience of learning about MLK. Second, photographs were used to complement the students’ limited historical knowledge of MLK’s life. I used photographs as a means of providing students with historical information about multi-dimensional aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights movement in a way that did not overwhelm them. To give students information about the historical context of photographs, particularly lesser-known photographs, I accompanied each photo with a detailed caption. Third, I considered the fact that “[p]hoto elicitation demonstrate[s] the polysemic quality of the image” (Harper, 2002, p. 15). Although the captions told students about the meanings of the photographs, photo elicitation interviews allowed students to arrive at multiple interpretations because of the polysemic quality of the images. To encourage multiple interpretations, I intentionally included some photographs taken at an unusual angle or in an unusual context. Indeed, students in the present study often interpreted the same photographs differently. Students’ multiple readings of the photographs were important for the present study because my study aimed to elicit and encourage multiple voices.

The photo elicitation interviews for this study were designed to engage students in constructing a commemorative narrative of MLK Day with their group members. Specifically, students were asked to choose six out of eighteen MLK-related photographs that they wanted to display in the school lobby on the upcoming MLK Day. Through the photo elicitation interview, I sought to answer the following research questions:

- What do students want to commemorate on MLK Day?
- Specifically, what aspects of MLK and the Civic Rights movement do students think are important to know, and why do they think so?
- How do students' identities shape their ideas?

Yet, the goal of this dissertation study is not limited to answering the research questions above. This study ultimately aims to understand how students perceive their previous learning experiences about MLK/the Civil Rights movement in and out of schools. Although I did not explicitly ask them about this, during the interviews, students often juxtaposed their previous memories of MLK and the Civil Rights movement and their final set of images for the MLK Day exhibition. In doing so, students often critiqued the simplistic version that they had been used to hearing for its lack of diversity, complexity, and balance, and they did so from fresh perspectives, compared to previous studies on the MLK curriculum or the collective memory of MLK. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to walk my readers through students' multiple perspectives on the official narrative of MLK. To this purpose, I have organized my dissertation as follows:

Chapter 2 details the study's theoretical background—including Gills' explanation of the interdependence between memory and identity, the context of MLK Day commemoration in the U.S., and literature on U.S. students' perspectives on MLK and the Civil Rights movement

Chapter 3 explains the study's method—photo elicitation group interviews. This chapter describes the research context and procedures for data collection as well as for data analysis. Included in this chapter is an explanation of the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Chapter 4 presents one of the major findings of this study: students' efforts to add more diversity and complexity to the Civil Rights story. This chapter highlights differences in students' perceptions of MLK as an advocate for everybody and their representations of diverse actors who joined the Civil Rights movement. This chapter also presents my interpretation of students' various intentions in displaying diverse actors, which was informed by Gills (1996)'s accounts of the interplay between identity and memory, Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of ideological becoming and of utterances as citation, and de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics.

Chapter 5 displays another key finding of this study: students' emphasis on the balance between the bright and dark sides in representing MLK and the Civil Rights movement. This chapter sheds light on students' different justifications for the inclusion of struggle and violence in their MLK Day exhibition. This chapter also illuminates the role of students' identities and lived experiences in shaping their affective reactions to MLK's achievements as well as to the racial violence committed during the Civil Rights movement, drawing on Zerubavel's (1996) concept of *sociobiographical memory* and Werner's (2002) concept of *reflexive readings*.

Chapter 6, after a brief summarization of the key findings of this study, discusses the implications of this dissertation study for researchers and educators. This chapter also discusses the limitations of this study and some elements for readers to consider regarding the findings presented in this dissertation.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this chapter, I begin by making explicit the socially constructive nature of memory and identity to set the stage for showing how national commemoration still matters in the era of globalization, particularly in a multicultural nation like the United States. In the first section, “Context of Martin Luther King Jr. Day Commemoration”, I briefly review the history of commemorations in the Western world from the national phase to the present post-national phase, mainly drawing on the work of the historian John Gills. Along the broad lines of commemoration history, I examine change and continuity observed in national commemorative practices in the U.S. The purpose of this section is to provide a social, cultural, political and historical context for the topic of this study. The second section, “National Enculturation and Education”, highlights the tension between diversity and unity that has long existed in the field of social studies education. Then, in the last section, “Literature Review”, I explore literature that talks about U.S. high school students’ perspectives on MLK and the Civil Rights movement. Included in this section is research on students’ understanding of historical significance as well as research on racial differences in students’ interpretations of the national past and the current society. This chapter closes with an explanation of how the present study was influenced by the themes and questions found in this literature review.

## **Context of Martin Luther King Jr. Day Commemoration**

### **Relationship between Memory and Identity**

Memory and identity are key terms for understanding the politics of national identity construction through commemoration. It is important to understand the relationship of the two terms and their socially constructive nature. Gills (1996) explains how the notion of identity and the idea of memory are interdependent, as he explains that any individual group needs shared memories to sustain its group identity, namely, "a sense of sameness over time and space," and that what constitutes such collective memory is defined by the assumed identity (p.3). Moreover, people are constantly revising their memories to suit their current identities. Indeed, both "memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena" (p. 3).

### **Commemoration in the National Era**

National identities, like all forms of identity, are constructed and reconstructed. Collective memories of the national past are also changing over time. The essays presented in the seminal book, *Commemorations: Politics of National Identity*, make it apparent that such changes are not something natural, but rather products of human decisions. In both Europe and North America, such decisions have been made through fierce battles over the very conception of the nation as well as the ideal version of national identity, serving particular interests and ideological positions (Gills, 1996). Eugen Weber's vivid accounts of the modernization of rural France show how French conservatives refused to become Frenchmen, namely, a sovereign people (Weber, 1976). Objecting to the idea of the nation state, the peasantry refused to participate in national commemorative activities and to exchange local memory for national

memory until almost the First World War. Even in North America, where the conception of the nation state was welcome, national commemorations were contested from the very beginning. As Gills (1996) observes, Philadelphians were divided regarding how American independence should be honored until the 1850s: “[r]ival elites and working-class groups paraded their differences in the streets, sometimes clashing violently over the interpretation of the revolutionary heritage” (p. 9).

Although Gills (1996) states that this struggle was on the decline when Americans began to celebrate July 4 in “a consensual manner” (p. 9), it would be more accurate to say there was consensus only among “European Americans.” A former slave, Frederick Douglass, boldly exposed this painful history in his Fourth of July speech in 1852:

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sound of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour. (“The meaning,” n.d., para. 4)

Douglass’ speech reminds us that national commemoration work involves exclusion and oblivion. The events and the people that are considered ill-fitted to the ideal version of national

identity have been left out from—or simply not selected as institutionalized memories of—the national past (Gills, 1996; VanSledright, 2008). The memories inscribed in the post-Civil War monuments in the American North and South may represent consensus between old enemies; yet, at the same time, it shows us that “[p]ost-Civil War American identity was forged by forgetting the contributions of African Americans to the military effort, forgetting even what the struggle had been about” (Gills, 1996, p. 10).

Yet it should be noted that previously marginalized groups of people began to enter into the door of national commemorations. Martin Luther King Jr. is a great example of this. Americans now memorialize the life and legacy of this African American civil rights activist with a national holiday. While MLK Day is now observed nationwide, few pay attention to how it became a permanent part of the U.S. public calendar. Here is a short history of MLK Day:

The campaign for a federal holiday in King's honor began soon after his assassination in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed the holiday into law in 1983, and it was first observed three years later. At first, some states resisted observing the holiday as such, giving it alternative names or combining it with other holidays. It was officially observed in all 50 states for the first time in 2000 (“Martin,” n.d., para. 2).

New Hampshire became the 50th state to honor Dr. King when its lawmakers finally approved the holiday bill. However, the vote in the House (212 to 148) showed a lack of consensus on commemorating Dr. King even after deliberating for about seventeen years. The small Black population in this state could help explain its delayed acceptance of this national commemoration (as of 1999, it has only about 8,000 Black people in a population of 1.2million). The ostensible reasons for several legislators’ objecting to the bill ranged from “contentions that

Dr. King should not be singled out from among a constellation of other great civil rights leaders to a denunciation of ‘mindless conformism’” (Goldbergmay, 1999, May 26). Yet, a major reason for their objection may have been that their own definition of national values differed from what MLK pursued in his last three years, which was exemplified in his commitment to economic justice and pacifism.

Several scholars are more critical of representations of Dr. King in U.S. history (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Wills, 1996). Barton and Levstik (2004) argued that King was able to become a part of the official memories of the national past because his deeds represented the core of a desirable American national identity—freedom and progress. King is now remembered not as a symbol of racial discrimination but a symbolic figure who overcame discrimination and finally achieved freedom in public memory (Barton & Levstik, 2004). MLK Day may be intended to signify that racial discrimination ended back then, just like slavery is taught in schools as a fixed “past” problem (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Wills, 1996).

Women have been invisible in national commemorations until just recently. Or, at best, the images of women in collective memories were limited to a stereotyped gender role and were quite “allegorical” (Gills, 1996, p. 10). This is not surprising given the fact that the bureaucracy of memory was largely run by elite males, and thereby national commemorations were reserved for their achievements and contributions (Gills, 1996). During the interwar period, women were mainly featured as widows or war mothers who made sacrifices through husbands and sons: “the memory of women war workers was not to gain public recognition until 1970s” (Gills, 1996, p. 13). Although the Statue of Liberty came to stand in New York as a symbol of national identity, and Susan B. Anthony came to appear as the first woman on a circulating coin in 1979, no woman has been honored with a federal holiday yet. Instead, women have Mother’s Day as one

of the most widely observed holidays in practice. However, Gills (1996) insightfully points to a bitter truth in the celebration of mother's day when he states, "the creation of mother's days in America and Europe on the eve of the First World War simply underlined the gendered nature of national commemorative practice, for it was not for their deeds but for their being that women were remembered" (p. 10). Indeed, women have been admitted to the national memory in their own right at an even slower pace than they gained civil rights.

No one group can be compared to soldiers when it comes to prevalence in national commemoration. Two out of ten federal holidays—Memorial Day and Veterans Day—were designated by the U.S. Congress to honor the fallen or wounded soldiers. There are myriads of places and monuments for memorializing them across the nation. This is not surprising given that wars pervade the U.S. history curriculum (Gerstle, 1997). Unlike Northern Ireland, where wars are remembered as tragedy, wars often are portrayed in a celebratory and uncritical manner in institutionalized memory in the U.S. (Barton & Levstik, 2004; VanSledright, 2008). Thus, what is recalled on Memorial Day and Veterans Day is more likely to be triumph than tragedy. The spirit and image of the fallen have become the very embodiment of national identity, repeatedly utilized on film as well as in political rhetoric.

As Gills (1996) writes, identities and memories "have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories" (p. 5). This is also true for national commemorative practice, even when it is related to celebrating triumph in war. Several holidays came in and went out from the stage of national commemoration throughout U.S. history. One good example would be Victory Day, which was originally proclaimed as Victory over Japan Day or V-J Day by President Harry S. Truman. Victory Day was officially observed on September 2 nationwide

from 1948 until 1975. Images from Victory day celebrations around the U.S. and the world reflected

the overwhelming sense of relief and exhilaration felt by citizens of Allied nations at the end of the long and bloody conflict. In one particularly iconic photo taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt for Life magazine, a uniformed sailor passionately kisses a nurse in the midst of a crowd of people celebrating in New York City's Times Square ("V-J Day," 2009, Reaction to Japanese surrender, para. 2.)

However, this iconic photo seemed to fade into the mists of old memory as Japan became one of America's closest allies, as well as an important economic partner. This change in national commemoration may also reflect the recently growing global attention to Hiroshima and Nagasaki as symbols of tragedy and of the destructive power of nuclear weapon, which seems to conflict with the U.S. national identity as a world peacemaker. Now Rhode Island remains as the only state that observes Victory Day in the U.S. ("V-J Day," 2009), reminding us that we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities and our redefinitions of our enemies.

### **Commemorations in the Post-National Era**

In the previous section, I have discussed how identity depends on memory and vice versa and how both are constantly changing, with vivid examples from national commemorative practices in the U.S. These examples clearly demonstrate that both national identity and national memory work are social and political constructs. Although some of the examples came from the recent past (e.g., MLK Day), the focus so far has remained on the time period that Gills (1996) calls "the national phase," indicating the period from the American and French revolutions to the 1960s (p. 5). Before moving into the present, post-national phase, I will briefly address the shifts

made in commemorations in terms of its form and location during the transition period following the national phase.

According to Gills (1996), the Cold War served in its own way as a turning point in the history of commemorations. Gills points out, “[t]he blurring of the old distinction between war and peace meant that it was very difficult to define the beginning or endings that had previously been the focus of memory” (p. 13). Gills further states that facing difficulties in commemorating the Korean, Algerian, and Vietnam conflicts except on a private basis, Americans invented the concept of building a wall of names at places where anyone could be memorialized at any time. It is generally agreed that the memorial on the Mall represents a departure from “the highly institutionalized rites of memory” that were performed by the honor guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, signaling the coming of the post-national era (Gills, 1996, p. 13).

Gills (1996) observes that the era of national commemorations was clearly coming to a close by the 1960s in the Western world. His observation seems fairly applicable to the U.S. as well. According to Congressional Research Service (2014), the first four federal holidays were created in 1870, and Congress had since added five federal holidays, including Columbus Day, by 1968. Since MLK Day came into the U.S. public calendar in 1983, no new federal holiday has been added since, although several legislators have proposed an official, nationwide observance of Cesar E. Chavez Day, Election Day, or Susan B. Anthony Day (Congressional Research Service, 2014, pp. 9-10).

We live in the post-national era, in which “memory has simultaneously become more global and more local” (Gills, 1996, p. 14). Gills acutely describes, “[e]vents and places with international meaning such as Hiroshima, Chernobyl, Auschwitz, and Nanjing capture the



world's attention even when the nations responsible may wish to forget them" (p. 14). At the same time, people find more meaning in local than in national commemorations, as a growing number of local festivals (e.g., Mardi Gras) prove; "people now prefer to devote time to local, ethnic, and family memory, often using the old national calendars and spaces for these new purposes" (Gills, 1996, p. 14).

The decentralization of commemorative practices also means that memory has become more democratic and pluralistic. While "old holidays and monuments have lost much of their power to commemorate" (Gills, 1996, p. 20), contemporary Americans seem to be recovering their right to remember the past in a way that celebrates and sustains their own identities. There are celebrations to honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez, who was an American farm worker, labor leader and civil rights activists in several states, including California. Many African Americans choose to commemorate Emancipation Day, which is generally called "Juneteenth," in place of Independence Day, demonstrating their different emphasis in memorializing historical events.

While this diversification is encouraging, people came to face an unexpected problem—an obligation to remember more and more. Contemporary memory work has become more burdensome, Gills (1996) argues, "due in large part to the fact that in modern society everyone belongs simultaneously to several different groups, each with its own collective memory" (p. 15). As individual identities are proliferating, people have come to need the support of multiple devices not to forget memories. It is not surprising that the market often contributes in its own way to lightening the burden, producing films or advertisements as reminders. Gills warns about a dark side of a reliance on this kind of external memory device:

Of course, taking memory out of the hands of specialists, diffusing its practices over time and space, runs the risk of merely privatizing rather than really

democratizing it. Today packaged forms of both memory and history have proved so profitable that we must be wary of the results of commodification and commercialization as much as the consequences of political manipulation. (pp. 19-20).

Certainly, Gills would not mean to argue that we need to go back to the national era in which national officials dominated in constructing memory and performing commemorative practices, limiting ordinary people to the role of spectator. Rather, Gills suggests, “democratic societies need to publicize rather than privatize the memories and identities of all groups, so that each may know and respect the other’s versions of the past, thereby understanding better what divides as well as unites us” (p. 20).

I am whole-heartedly in agreement with Gills’ above suggestion. I believe that it is time for Americans to talk openly about the memories and identities of all groups, and that such conversation could prove highly fruitful. More than half of the states no longer observe Columbus Day, or have renamed it to Indigenous People’s Day or Native American Heritage Day, reflecting a historical revaluation of Columbus. Some states have decided to combine it with other days, diluting the negative image of Columbus. When Columbus Day was made a federal holiday in 1968, several reasons were offered for it; according to the Congressional report *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices* (2014), “[a]mong the most prominent was that observance was already an established holiday in 45 states” (p. 6). If the wide observance was the major reason for creating Columbus day at the federal level, there seems to be no reason to hesitate in removing it from the national calendar; this may, however, meet strong resistance from those who find American identity in the heritage of early European settlers (Gerstle, 1997; VanSledright, 2008). Although legislation has not been officially

introduced to commemorate September 9 at the federal level, I have seen that many bloggers argue that September 9 deserves a national holiday. While there is no doubt September 9 should not be forgotten, it may not be easy to arrive at a consensus on how it should be remembered. Some Americans may want to remember the bravery of heroic actors such as firefighters and police officers (Barton & Levstik, 2004) or the evil of Islamic terrorists more than innocent deaths.

For this dissertation study, I chose MLK Day as the national holiday to focus on. This is because MLK has become a national symbol of Americans' democratic ideals and progress in racial relations. In addition, MLK holds a significant status in social studies education. MLK and the Civil Rights Movement are not merely topics in the social studies curriculum; rather they serve as "a means of imparting civic education" (Neumann, 2018, p. 46). The aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights Movement that deserve commemoration must be considered from one's social and moral values as well as one's national values. In other words, what deserves attention on MLK Day cannot be determined without the involvement of one's identity. It may seem more comfortable to ignore competing social visions and conflicting interpretations of the past. In fact, our tendency is to delay discussing these conflicting interpretations until a certain impetus is provided—just as the Charleston shooting opened public conversation about the Confederate flag and the ideologies that it embodies. I believe it will be better for us to dialogue with other Americans whose visions of the past are different from ours before another tragic event occurs. I hope this study provides such opportunities for readers and thereby deepens their understanding of what divides as well as unites them.

### **National Enculturation and Education**

Before I review relevant empirical research, I think it is important to note the role of schooling for national enculturation, as well as the tension between diversity and unity with respect to the curriculum contents in the field of social studies education. For any kind of community to function and thrive over time, its new members and old members must share some sense of sameness. National enculturation is particularly important, as the members of the nation state—what Benedict Anderson (2006) calls “an imagined political community”—must be able to assume that those who have never met with one another share some common sense. According to Barrett (2007):

The definition of the term “nation” implies the process of national enculturation entails the child learning about the particular national community to which he or she belongs, about its homeland, its shared history and myths of ancestry, its common mass public culture, and its shared values, symbols, traditions, customs and practices; it also implies that national enculturation involves the child learning how to participate in the shared traditions, customs and practices of his or her nation. In addition, the definition of the term “state” implies that national enculturation entails the child learning about the state to which he or she belongs, about its government, about the administrative apparatus through which that government controls the people, groups, organizations and institutions that fall within its borders, and about the role of the police and the military in backing up the demands of the government. (pp. 578-583)

In addition to this thought of cognitive and behavioral aspects of the national enculturation process, Barrett (2007) further notes its affective dimension. Barrett suggests that

national enculturation also involves “a process that generates a subjective sense of personal affiliation and belonging and an emotional attachment to the history, culture and territory of the child’s own nation and state, engendering in children a sense of who they are, influencing how they see themselves, and impacting on how they locate themselves within the wider world” (pp. 586-588).

Undoubtedly, the process of national enculturation occurs in and outside of school. However, as Hahn (1999) notes, “in the United States, the schools’ role is particularly important,” and the school subject called “social studies” bears a particular responsibility for this task in the name of civic education (p. 586). In particular, the U.S. history and Civics/Government classrooms have played a key role in developing students’ sense of who they are as a nation. As shown in the observation of Barton and Levstik (2004), “[h]istory and civics textbooks convey a clear and consistent national story that emphasizes the founding people, events, and documents of the nation; only wars compete with national origins as source of content in textbooks” (p. 50). More importantly, the story line is highly linear with twin central themes of freedom and progress; at the same time, those that seem ill-fitted to this grand narrative are often edited out (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Levstik, 2000).

Not surprisingly, this highly monolithic manner of presenting the national past has been critiqued by many scholars and educators (e.g., Keith Barton and John Wills). Some criticize teaching this single vision of the past as “coercive Americanization” and call for more inclusive curricula (Gerstle, 1997; VanSledright, 2008). Over the past two decades, more scholars and educators have begun to respond this call, trying to incorporate the history of previously marginalized groups of people into the curriculum (Bohan, 2017). In particular, there is increased attention given to Black History Month and Women’s History Month that provide a time in the

school calendar where educators can shift the focus more explicitly to the roles and contributions of African Americans and Women (Bohan, 2017; Wineburg & Monte-Sano, 2008). While this stream seems strong, there are also those who try to swim against it, expressing concerns about weakened unity and lack of common sense among young Americans (e.g., Ravitch, 2000). Some of them readily fight to protect “the hallowed ground of the nation-building story of American history from threatening forces,” exercising their influence over the state policy (e.g., Florida; see VanSledright, 2008, p. 109). Indeed, the battle over memory and identity is ongoing in the field of social studies education.

### **Literature Review**

That social studies curricula and textbooks present a single vision of history and civic ideals does not necessarily mean that students make sense of the past and the current society only in that way. School knowledge and student knowledge cannot be equated, not only because of diverse information sources such as family and media, but also because of students’ agency in constructing meaning. Acknowledging this premise of constructivist theory, social studies researchers began to focus more on the meaning students construct as they learn subject areas (see Shaver, 1991; Rosa, Voss, & Carretero, 1994).

Among a vast body of research on students’ ideas about history and contemporary society, I focus on empirical studies that explore how students assign significance to the past, mainly conducted in North America. Although there is a sizeable body of empirical research by European developmental psychologists that explicitly delve into students’ development of national identity, I decided to refer to those studies only when needed. Although some part of this scholarship associate students’ national identity with their understanding of national historical icons, its main focus lies in the development of students’ knowledge of, feeling about

and attitudes towards their own national groups and national out-groups. However, since my interest is not in how students develop national identity, but in how they construct national memories to suit their current identities, it seems more reasonable to begin to look at literatures that talk about students' accounts of historical significance. In other words, I begin by reviewing studies on what students see as significant from a vast pool of historical events, figures and documents.

One of the seminal studies addressing students' understandings of historical significance was conducted by Barton and Levstik (1998), who interviewed forty-eight students in grades five through eight. The participants were from various regions, from inner-city to rural and suburban areas, and their racial and ethnic backgrounds were diverse. The main purpose of this study was to examine how early adolescents evaluated significance in U.S. history, and how they used history to create a sense of collective identity. To that end, Barton and Levstik asked students to select eight pictures that they thought were important enough to include on a timeline of the last 500 years from among a set of twenty captioned historical pictures, and then asked them to explain their selections and omissions. All interviews were conducted with single-sex groups of either three or four students. Barton and Levstik (1998) found:

Students chose pictures and gave explanations that focused to a large extent on the origin and development of the United States as a social and political entity, on the creation and development of what they perceived as uniquely American freedoms and opportunities, and on the beneficial effects of technological change. Students generally excluded, on the other hand, pictures of people and events that they recognized as having widespread impact but could not assimilate to their image of the country's continuous and beneficial progress. (p. 482)

While the images of the Bill of Rights and the American Revolution were consistently selected by every group, no groups selected the images of O.J. Simpson, Elvis Presley, and frontier life.

In explaining their selection for the image of the Revolution, the students repeated the story of the nation's birth. More importantly, "[s]tudents consistently used the pronouns *our* and *we* in talking about the American Revolution, regardless of their own ethnic background, gender, or the recency of their families' immigration to the United States" (p. 484). Some of the examples of this included "kinda started our country," "we would have no country," and "we'd still be part of England" (p. 484).

Another picture that every group consistently selected was the image of the Bill of Rights. In explaining their selection, the students emphasized it as the foundation of American freedom. When it came to racism and sexism, most of the students were aware of disjuncture between the ideal described in the Bill of Rights and the reality. However, their awareness of the remaining injustice and discriminations did not make them hesitant to be proud of "the progressive development and extension of American rights and opportunities" in the past (Barton & Levstik, 1998, p. 486). Both African American students and European-American students framed the painful past—such as slavery—as a story of lessons for the present; African American students demonstrated "a more complex analysis of progress in extending rights to marginalized people" using vernacular history nurtured by their family and cultural community than their European-American counterparts, though (p. 492).

When it came to war, Barton and Levstik (1998) found differences in the students' historical explanations about the American Revolution and the Civil War vs. World War II and the Vietnam War. The students had no problem explaining why the former group was historically significant, mentioning its contribution to the expansion of freedom. However, the



latter group presented a problem. The students struggled to fit World War II and the Vietnam War into the grand narrative of progress. Some of them tried to make sense of the wars as an example of showing America's moral superiority, commenting "we stand up for people," whereas others rather related it to the country's "ability to learn from its mistakes." For the lesson from the Vietnam War, some students mentioned, "[it] taught us that we weren't invincible, that there are other people who are willing to give up more than us to get what they needed," and "[we] should not slowly go into a war" (p. 490).

Based on the study conducted by Barton and Levstik (1998), as far as social studies education concerns the national enculturation project, it seems quite successful. The students acquire the grand narrative of U.S. history—freedom and progress—and even seem to internalize it as a part of their interpretive schema to make sense of the past. Barton and Levstik's findings give us significant insights into what students consider as historically important. The students in the study assign significance to the past when it bears any sort of utility for the present—whether it helps them understand where they originate and who they are as a nation, helps them feel good about the nation they belong to, or helps them learn lessons from mistakes. This finding suggests that students seek to draw some kind of connections between the past and their own lives or to their contemporary community, and they use historical events to construct their own national identity. No significant differences with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity were found in this major finding.

Barton and Levstik's (1998) findings are echoed in Hahn's (1999) study on civic education in the United States. This study was conducted as a larger project named "Twenty-four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project". In this study, Hahn examined U.S. students' national identity through focus group interviews of students, along with other three

domains that they were expected to learn in social studies class. I mainly report the findings regarding national identity here. Hahn and her research team conducted “two focus groups with Grades 8 and 9 students (approximately 14 years old) who attended four different schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area and two with students of the same age in two different communities in Texas” (p. 588). To understand young adolescents’ sense of national identity, when Hahn and her research team asked the participants what it means to them to be an American:

In all four groups, students said ‘freedom’ and ‘being free’. One explained, ‘We have a lot more freedom to express our beliefs than [people in] other countries,’ Several Hispanic students in Texas noted that being an American meant being a citizen or legal resident as opposed to ‘not legal’. In that group, as we as the others, students expressed pride in being Americans at the same time as they described ways in which the totality of the nation’s history has not lived up the ideal of freedom and equality for all.....Students said they associated being an American with democracy, various political institutions and rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (Hahn, 1999, p. 595)

Similar to the students in Barton and Levstik (1998), the students in the study clearly identified with the official narrative of U.S. history. According to Hahn (1999), the students identified with the storyline of freedom and progress, frequently using the pronouns *we*, *us*, and *our*, “even when they knew that their own personal ancestors were not part of the dominant group at the time of the particular event to which they referred” (p. 597).

Hahn (1999) further reported the students in the focus groups often associated being American with several authoritative documents and famous speeches treated as cannon: “The Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights

and Martin Luther King Jr's 'I Have a Dream' speech" (p. 597). The students also identified a number of national heroes they had learned about in school, including presidents, military leaders, and civil rights leaders. However, Hahn sensed a troubling signal that the students rarely had an opportunity to critically consider the deeds of such heroes.

Hahn (1999) also found the association between students' sense of national identity and their perceptions of allies and enemies. According to Hahn:

The students in our focus groups mentioned England, Germany and Japan as countries that were once enemies but are now allies. Similarly, a few students mentioned that France and Spain had once been enemies of the United States but now are friends. Iraq was the only country that students cited as a contemporary enemy. (p. 597)

That American students have a keen sense of national enemies is consistent with the findings of European developmental psychology studies, "which have examined English children's feelings towards Germans (e.g., Barrett & Short, 1992; Buchanan-Barrow et al., 1999, September), Turkish children's feelings towards Greeks (Buchanan-Barrow et al., 1999, September), and Azeri children's feelings towards Russian (Bennett et al., 2004)" (Barrett, 2005, p. 269). According to Barrett (2005), children begin to attribute less-positive characteristics to traditional national enemies than other nations from early years. In particular, Jahoda (1962) found, in his study with Scottish children from six to eleven years, the children often used references to past wars to justify their negative feelings towards Germany. Given these findings from European studies, it is not surprising that the 14 years-old American students in Hahn's (1999) pointed to Iraq as a contemporary enemy. Some additional important findings to note in her study were the students' awareness of flexibility in defining national enemies and friends, as

well as their use of national out-groups in explaining what it means for them to be American. Identifying national allies and enemies, in itself, is not a problem; however, it could become problematic when students seek to build their national identity mainly around the strict boundary between national in-groups and out-groups and they are mobilized to monger phobia towards particular national out-groups without critical examination.

Based on the studies by Barton and Levstik (1998) and Hahn (1999), U.S. students seem to subscribe to the institutionalized collective memory regardless of race, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. However, the studies I review in what follows provide somewhat different findings.

Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) conducted a sweeping survey targeting eleventh and twelfth graders from public high schools in each of the fifty states, in which participants were asked to list the most famous individuals from American history. This survey was carried out in 2004-2005. Before I report the survey results, I think it is important to note what directed Wineburg and Monte-Sano to this study. Observing the mixed opinions over the impact of the recent changes towards more inclusive social studies curricula (e.g., Black History Month), Wineburg and Monte-Sano began to wonder, “Have changes in curriculum materials made a dent in popular historical consciousness? Whom do contemporary American schoolchildren define as the people who “made history”? Do today’s youth envision a pantheon of “famous Americans” still defined by the traditional canon or one that reflects the opening up of history to the previously unstoried?” (p. 1188). These questions led the researchers to set out to explore young students’ perceptions of (new) American heroes. In explaining the procedure of this survey study, Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) state:

Our simple questionnaire contained ten blank lines, split into part A and part B. Students filled out surveys in their regular social studies classes after teachers read from the following prompt: “Starting from Columbus to the present day, jot down the names of the most famous Americans in history. The only ground rule is that *they cannot be president.*” After students had completed part A (about five to seven minutes), teachers read these instructions: “Look at Part B. On these five lines, write down the names of the five most famous *women* from American history. The only ground rule is that they can’t be the *wives* of presidents.” (pp. 1188-1189)

Wineburg and Monte-Sano further made it explicit why they used the word “famous” instead of the words “significant” or “important,” which have been widely used in previous research addressing a similar topic, referencing the pilot study in which “[t]hose substitutions yielded little difference in students’ responses, except the feedback that ‘famous’ was the prompt most intuitively understood” (p. 1189).

Surprisingly, Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) found that “the top three names were all African Americans: Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman” (p. 1190). These leading three Black Americans were followed by two White figures; one was a women’s rights activist, Susan B. Anthony, and the other was a former president, Benjamin Franklin. Also included within the top-ten list were Amelia Earhart, Oprah Winfrey, Marilyn Monroe, Thomas Edison, and Albert Einstein. That two of the top three were women may be in part the reflection of the survey design’s asking participants to list only women in one half of the list. However, it is quite encouraging that “although 67 % of the two thousand respondents named King, only about half as many (34%) mentioned the first White name on the list, Susan B. Anthony (p. 1190).”

To explore whether this result could be considered as the impact of changed curriculum, Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) further surveyed two thousand American-born adults aged forty-five and over, and then compared the responses of two different age groups. Contrary to the researchers' expectations, the result revealed little difference: "[a]mong the ten most named figures for young people and adults, eight were identical" (p. 1191). In the diagram of this comparison, Marilyn Monroe and Albert Einstein appear only in the students' circle whereas Betsy Ross and Henry Ford appear only in the adults' circle. However, Wineburg and Monte-Sano found something that could imply the influence of the curriculum changes when they specifically analyzed respondents who listed Harriet Tubman as one of the most famous American. According to Wineburg and Monte-Sano, "Tubman's presence was inversely related to the age of our respondents: 11% of the oldest adults named her, compared to 19% of younger adults and 44% of students" (p. 1194). They further pointed out, "[e]ven though Tubman's exploits occurred during the Civil War, her prominence in American memory is relatively recent" (p. 1194).

Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) also examined whether students' demographic factors had any influence on their responses. As a result of logistic regression, Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) found:

The most pronounced differences among students' responses were by race-- particularly between African American and White students. For example, even though King appeared on 64% of all White students' lists, he appeared on 82% of all Black students' lists. Black students were nearly three times more likely than White students to name King, twice as likely as Whites to name Tubman and Oprah Winfrey, and 1.5 times as likely to name Parks. Students' race also

predicted their likelihood of naming other figures in the top ten. For example, White students named every White figure at significantly higher rates than did Blacks. The differences between White and Black students can be seen in their respective top ten lists. Five names overlap: the four African American figures and Anthony. Whereas Black students' top ten is dominated by nine Black figures, White students' top ten combines White and Blacks. (p. 1191)

These findings show that race plays a significant role in identifying historically significant figures and yet, at the same time, that young Americans have some level of shared understanding of new American heroes. Wrapping up the paper, Wineburg and Monte-Sano concluded, “[w]hile some of the old standbys still appear--Benjamin Franklin defines resilience in our time no less than in his own--the prominence of African Americans at the top of our lists is the most remarkable finding of this survey” (pp. 1193-94).

While Wineburg and Monte-Sano's (2008) comprehensive survey study reveals a remarkable change in the fame of historical figures, it tells us little about why a number of respondents listed the new American heroes. On this point, Wineburg and Monte-Sano are only able to speculate, claiming maybe there have been some changes in national narratives around American heroes. As Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) admitted, although there was a parallel between “broad changes in American students' pantheon of heroes” and overall changes in historical figures featured in textbooks, youth biographies and best-selling books, we cannot argue that the former was the direct result of latter (p. 1196).

A similar topic was explored by Epstein (1998), employing mixed methods through questionnaires as well as individual interviews. This study provides a richer understanding of the role of students' race in constructing their explanations of significant actors, events, and themes

in U.S. history. To examine specifically race-related differences in students' historical perspectives, in 1994 Epstein carried out a survey with 49 students (22 African-American and 27 European-American) enrolled in a African American female teacher's 11th-grade U.S. history classes; the school was located in an urban Midwestern working-class community. Then, Epstein (a White woman) and her African-American female graduate student assistant conducted an individual interview with some of the respondents within the same racial groups, respectively, in which participants were asked to explain more about their responses to the questionnaires. The survey questions asked not only about significant people and events in U.S. history, but also about "the credibility of secondary historical sources, family experiences and history discussed at home, differences between family- and school-based historical accounts, and treatment of African Americans historically and in contemporary society" (p. 401).

Table 2  
*Frequency of Response by Racial Group for Three Most Important People in U.S. History*

| Important Person        | African-American Students<br>(N <sup>a</sup> = 18) |    | European-American Students<br>(N <sup>a</sup> = 27) |    |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
|                         | R <sup>b</sup>                                     | %  | R <sup>b</sup>                                      | %  |
| Martin Luther King Jr.  | 16                                                 | 33 | 12                                                  | 18 |
| Malcom X                | 8                                                  | 17 | 0                                                   | 0  |
| Harriet Tubman          | 6                                                  | 13 | 0                                                   | 0  |
| John F. Kennedy         | 5                                                  | 10 | 14                                                  | 21 |
| Abraham Lincoln         | 2                                                  | 4  | 7                                                   | 10 |
| George Washington       | 2                                                  | 4  | 15                                                  | 22 |
| Tomas Jefferson         | 2                                                  | 4  | 8                                                   | 12 |
| Other African Americans | 4                                                  | 8  | 0                                                   | 0  |
| Others                  | 3                                                  | 6  | 11                                                  | 16 |

<sup>a</sup> Number of students who included at least one response for Question 1. <sup>b</sup> Number of responses is less than the maximum because not all students included three response to Question 1

\*The above table was directly adapted from *Deconstructing differences in African-American and European-American adolescents' perspectives on U.S. History*. Epstein, 1998, p. 401



The study by Epstein (1998) revealed stark racial divisions in young Americans' perceptions of historical significances rather than congruence. European-American students and African-American students were divergent not only in terms of their selection of important people and events, but also in their explanations of the selections. According to Epstein, "[a]lthough African and European-American students selected some of the same people and events as significant, differences in the frequencies of selections were significant (see Table 2 and 3)" (p. 403). When Epstein further compared the students' explanations of their selections by race, greatly different themes emerged. Epstein found that, while the European-American students frequently mentioned "nation building," few African-American students related historical significance to this theme. Conversely, the theme "African-American equality" appeared almost consistently in the African-American students' comments, whereas it was seen only in 22 % of the responses of their European-American counterparts.

More importantly, the students in Epstein's (1998) study provided different explanations for common selections. It was apparent that the students' racial identity played a significant role in engendering such differences. For example, when asked to elaborate their selections of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as an important figure, most African-American students cited King's contributions to their racial group specifically, and all African-American students interviewed consistently commented that "they admired King" and "family members had talked about King's role in creating greater equality for African Americans" (Epstein, 1998, p. 404). However, only a few European-American students cited King's contributions to African American equality, and none of them mentioned any experience of discussing King's role in U.S. history at home. Instead, the European-American students chiefly "referred to King in vague terms, such as he

“had a dream,” “changed people’s lives,” or “made a lot of good speeches” (Epstein, 1998, p. 404).

Table 3  
*Frequency of Responses by Racial Group for Three Most Important Events in U.S. History*

| Event                                       | African-American<br>Students<br>(N <sup>a</sup> = 19) |    | European-American<br>Students<br>(N <sup>a</sup> = 25) |    |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
|                                             | R <sup>b</sup>                                        | %  | R <sup>b</sup>                                         | %  |
| Civil rights movement                       | 10                                                    | 25 | 6                                                      | 9  |
| Civil War                                   | 6                                                     | 15 | 12                                                     | 18 |
| Slavery and emancipation                    | 6                                                     | 15 | 2                                                      | 3  |
| Martin Luther King Jr. assassination        | 5                                                     | 13 | 2                                                      | 3  |
| Bill of Rights                              | 4                                                     | 10 | 6                                                      | 9  |
| John F. Kennedy assassination               | 2                                                     | 5  | 6                                                      | 9  |
| Declaration of<br>Independence/Constitution | 2                                                     | 5  | 11                                                     | 16 |
| Technological advances                      | 1                                                     | 2  | 3                                                      | 4  |
| Twentieth-century wars                      | 1                                                     | 2  | 8                                                      | 12 |
| American Revolution                         | 0                                                     | 0  | 8                                                      | 12 |
| Other                                       | 3                                                     | 8  | 4                                                      | 6  |

<sup>a</sup> Number of students who included at least one response for Question 2. <sup>b</sup> Number of responses is less than the maximum because not all students included three response to Question 2

\*The table was directly adapted from *Deconstructing differences in African-American and European-American adolescents’ perspectives on U.S. History*. Epstein, 1998, p. 402.

These patterns were also found in the students’ explanations of John F. Kennedy, the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Bill of Rights. Although students in both groups considered the Bill of Rights as the foundation for individual or citizenship rights, their explanations of it greatly differed by race beyond this. In explaining the Bill of Rights, the African-American students frequently mentioned “how family members had been denied rights by White people in the past” (Epstein, 1998, p. 406). Some students believed that “the Founding

Fathers had written the Bill of Rights only for White people,” and even one student commented in the interview, “They were fighting for their freedom and wanted the Black people to be slaves. And to me all they were doing was fighting for their freedom” (Epstein, p. 406). By contrast, “none of the European-American students questioned or raised the limitations of its application historically, even though Ms. Hines [the history teacher] had emphasized that originally the Bill of Rights applied only to White males” (p. 404).

In summarizing the findings from the survey and interviews on this topic, Epstein (1998) concluded, “[d]ifferences in African American and European American Adolescents’ explanations of historical and contemporary actors and events reflected more substantive differences in the two groups’ perspectives on racial groups’ experiences in U.S. history and contemporary society” (p. 405).

Wrestling with racial division in students’ interpretations of national history, Epstein continued to conduct a series of studies (Epstein, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 2010). However, her later studies provide little evidence that runs counter to her initial findings or that shows a narrowed gap between two groups’ divergent views. In her most recent book, *Interpreting National History: Race, Identity, and Pedagogy in Classrooms and Communities*, Epstein (2010) states:

White and Black students began and ended the [school] year with different explanations and interpretations about the role of race and rights in national formation and development. They also constructed different ideas about the meaning and significance of a national identity. White students began the year with concepts of Europeans or White Americans as heroes and nation builders throughout the course of national history, Native Americans and Blacks appeared

intermittently primarily as victims and occasionally as isolated and exotic people (Native Americans) or civil rights leaders (Blacks). They held unwavering beliefs in the ubiquity of rights and saw the oppression of people of color or women as exceptions to the nation's legacy of expanding democracy and power. They equated national history and contemporary society with democratic rule at home and abroad and a majority believed that equality existed in contemporary society. The few who believed that racism still existed saw it as individual, rather than institutional, in nature. (pp. 86-87)

On the contrary,

Black students began the year with a different interpretive framework. They thought of Europeans or White Americans as nation builders and oppressors of Blacks and other people of color, Blacks as historical subjects as well as victims who struggled against oppression throughout national history, and Native Americans as having had "friendly" or conflict-ridden relations with Whites or the government. A large majority of Black adolescents and some children saw racism and exclusion from democratic principles or promises as ongoing, institutional, and inevitable aspects of national history and identity. (Epstein, 2010, p. 87)

It is striking that two groups of students who sit side-by-side in the same classroom interpret the formation of the nation and its development in a completely different way, leading to their contrasting meanings of American identity. For White students, the national identity is equated with "freedom" and "equal rights;" in contrast, Black students associate the national

identity with “a lack of freedom and rights for people of color” (Epstein, 2010, p. 114). Unfortunately, Epstein’s (2010) study found that teachers’ pedagogies had only limited influence on students’ interpretive frameworks in reading national history and understanding contemporary society, which they had acquired through participation in the discourses of family and racialized community.

My study builds on this body of work in that it also explores the interplay of memory and identity. However, this study adds one more layer to what previous studies have sought to understand: commemoration. The purpose of this study is not simply to examine what students consider historically significant, but also to explore what students want to commemorate on MLK Day.

People do not necessarily find something worthy of memorializing simply because it is historically significant. It becomes clear that the assigning of significance to the past is very cultural when American students’ thoughts on historically significant events are juxtaposed with those of Northern Irish students. In explaining their selections of particular historical events as significant, the Northern Irish students commonly mentioned “death” and “hardship” and connected the importance of these to the need for remembrance; they often spoke in such terms regarding their selections of the Irish Famine and the World Wars (Barton, 2005). However, the American students’ responses to the same question were quite different; rarely attending to the importance of remembrance, “their responses focused primarily on the origin and development of the United States as a social and political entity” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 92). According to Barton and Levstik, “remembrance is much less a part of our [American] culture than it is in Britain and Ireland” (p. 94). Barton and Levstik further state, “[g]iven that remembrance has a

somewhat modest public profile in the United States, it is not surprising that students here do not usually talk about history in such terms” (p. 94).

Thus, for American students, the question of remembrance is generally not equated with the question of historical significance. Hence, previous research on students’ understanding of historical significance provides limited knowledge about what young Americans consider as deserving of commemoration on MLK Day. Moreover, because previous studies only tell us that students consider MLK to be the most significant figure in U.S. history, we still know little about what aspects of MLK’s life and the Civil Rights movement are considered meaningful by students. Yet, if we asked them about this directly, their responses would be inevitably bounded by their previous memory of MLK and the Civil Rights movement. However, the purpose of this study is not to test students’ prior knowledge or examine their collective memory. Rather, this study aims to explore how, when given a wide range of historical information about MLK and the Civil Rights movement, students construct commemorative narratives of MLK Day and how they justify their choices. Specifically, this study aims to understand what aspects of this historical figure and event they think are important to present in the MLK Day exhibition. In addition, because memory and identity are interdependent, it is also a focus of this study to examine how students’ identities shape students’ choices and their rationales for those choices.

This study provides a space in which young Americans from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds openly talk about what is worth commemorating on MLK Day and what they think about memories of the most famous historical figure and the most significant event in the nation’s recent past. Ultimately, this study aims to explore students’ ideas about the way formal institutions have presented MLK and the Civil Rights movement. I hope this dissertation study, by presenting students’ voices in their commemorative narratives of MLK Day, will

contribute to the existing scholarly conversation as a meaningful response to the call of Barton and Levstik (2004) for future research:

Yet we recognize that some people do not embrace other identities and that in many cases, these provide alternatives to identification with the United States as a political entity. Research with children and adolescents is far from comprehensive, and we still need much more insight into variations among students from diverse backgrounds. Although identification with the national past appear widespread, it seems unlikely to be found universally across all ethnicities and geographic regions. Native Americans, for example, often see themselves as existing outside of and apart from the U.S. national past, and African Americans frequently incorporate African American heritage into their sense of self. Some White Southerners, meanwhile, may feel regionally distinct experiences are a more appropriate source of identity than dominant national stories, and members of certain religious groups may feel more connections with their counterparts in other countries than with Americans of other religions. We hope future research will provide a clearer picture of the development of these identities and their intersection with national ones. (pp. 53-54)

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The traditional research on collective memory of MLK has primarily involved rhetorical analysis of memory sites, such as commemorative speeches or the quotations of MLK inscribed on the wall of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial (e.g. Walker, 2013). Some scholars have investigated how commemorative narratives of MLK are constructed through constant negotiation among political elites from different parties, sponsors, and other interest groups (e.g., Bruyneel, 2014). This line of study is rooted in the sociology of knowledge or the sociology of memory; it shares an interest in the politics of memory or knowledge. It also has the premise that those who hold hegemony determine what counts as knowledge. When a change in collective memory is the focus of research, historiographical methods are often employed, for example, an analysis of archived materials by periods.

However, the interest of this dissertation study is somewhat different from that of the traditional research on the collective memory of MLK. This study is interested not in the past or current memory of a historical figure or event, but in its futurity. As an educator, I am interested in what young Americans want to commemorate on MLK Day, in particular, what aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights movement they consider to be meaningful, and why. Ultimately, I hope to help educators reconsider curriculum omissions or deficiencies in the MLK curriculum from students' perspectives. This study rests on a fundamental assumption that students are active performers in constructing memory as well as astute critics of their learning of historical figures or event (Barton, 2016). Therefore, the focus of this study is to listen to what students



have to say about MLK and the Civil Rights movement, rather than digging into sites of memory.

In this chapter, I will describe my use of photo elicitation interviews as a method, the context for this study, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. I will also explain the relationship between the researcher and the participants in this study.

### **Methods**

For this study, I used photo elicitation interviews to produce data. Employing elicitation techniques is particularly useful when researchers seek to understand participants' ideas about topics that they rarely talk about in everyday conversations or about controversial or sensitive topics (e.g., social taboos, race, religion, politics, etc.) (Barton, 2015). Using visual images such as photographs makes interviews more comfortable (Barton, 2015), longer, and more comprehensive (Collier, 1957). Photo elicitation was helpful for this study because, while students had a high level of familiarity with MLK, they rarely talked specifically about this figure in their everyday conversations; talking about photographs also helped elicit students' ideas about racial discrimination not only in the past but also in the present day, which could be too sensitive to share in everyday conversation. In addition, photo elicitation helped to enhance the depth of interviews, compared to verbal questioning that might lead to superficial or minimal responses because of students' taken-for-granted knowledge of this historical figure.

Another strength of photo elicitation relates to "the polysemic quality of images" (Harper, 2002, p. 15). Harper (2002) suggests that this method be regarded "as a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher" (p. 15) because neither photographers, nor researchers, nor interviewees can solely determine the meaning of photographs. By giving greater authority to participants, photo elicitation interviews can yield

“data that more authentically reflect their conceptual categories” (Barton, 2015, p. 182). Indeed, participants in the present study often interpreted photographs in ways that the researcher could not have anticipated, and two participants often saw different things in the same photographs, which contributed to producing richer data. In addition, photo elicitation helped bring to the surface students’ tacit ideas, values, and understandings because “the polysemic quality of images allows for different interpretations by observers based on their views, local knowledge and insights, as well as exchange of personal meaning and values that the images and their content might hold for them” (Collier & Collier, 1986) (Langmann & Pick, 2018, p. 8).

Photo elicitation has been employed as a useful research strategy across disciplines to better understand participants’ perspectives. In particular, social studies researchers often combined photo elicitation with an open-ended task. Various forms of tasks using photographs (e.g., a sorting task, a selecting task, an ordering task) were used to study students’ ideas. Among others, Sheehan and Davison’s (2017) study was greatly relevant to this study. In their study, Sheehan and Davison engaged participants in a Museum Display Task to delve into how young people in New Zealand make meaning of war remembrance and commemoration of the First World War. In the task, participants were asked to choose three out of six images that they thought best represented the meaning of Gallipoli. Through this photo elicitation task, Sheehan and Davison came to understand that participants were not passively reproducing cultural memory messages about war remembrance. However, Sheehan and Davison (2017) did not fully capture participants’ nuanced meanings of war remembrance because this photo elicitation task was administered not by researchers but by social studies teachers during lesson time, and it was a pencil and paper task rather than an oral one. Previous studies have shown that administering a photo elicitation task in paired or small-group interviews is more productive for generating richer

data (e.g., Barton & Levstik, 1996). Thus, I conducted photo elicitation interviews in small groups, adopting the Museum Display Task from Sheehan and Davison's (2017) study.

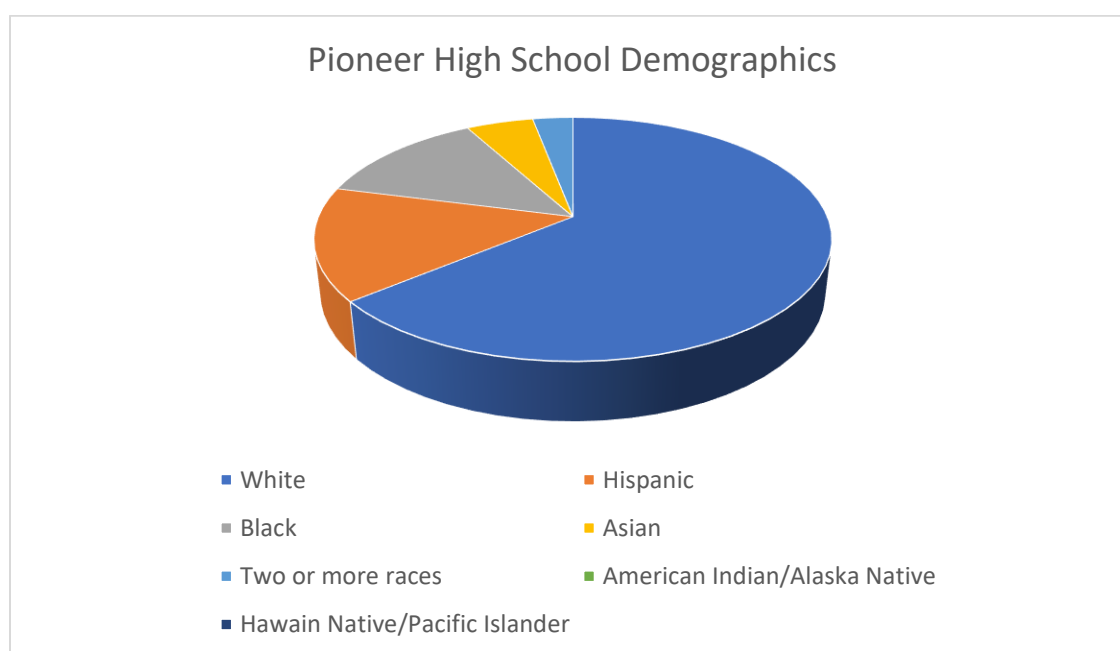
Photo elicitation is a useful research strategy; however, researchers should attend to several methodological cautions. Barton (2015) explains "[p]hoto-elicitation is an open-ended and transparent technique, but whenever researchers select stimulus materials, it limits participants' ability to represent their experiences" (p. 198). While acknowledging this limitation of photo elicitation, Barton and McCully (2010) stress its usefulness by stating: "[a]lthough supplying students with such materials [pictures] undoubtedly limited the range of possible responses, previous research with children's historical thinking suggested that a set of visual images would provoke a greater range and depth of response than asking them to verbally identify historical items on their own (Levstik & Barton, 2008)" (p. 154). In addition, as Harper (2002) suggests, "photos do not automatically elicit useful interviews" (p. 20); yet, based on her own and previous photo elicitation studies, photographs taken "from unusual angles" or "from very close" (p. 21) were more likely to lead interviewees to break frames. Barton and McCully (2010) intentionally chose "images that were ambiguous or that suggested multiple connections" to avoid limiting participants' responses to only a few categories or themes (p. 154). Although students' responses were inevitably bounded by the set of photographs that I selected, I tried to minimize this drawback by including the greatest possible range of items associated with MLK and the Civil Rights movement. Also, I intentionally included lesser-known and more candid photographs of MLK in ordinary life. Indeed, I found that these photographs sparked lively responses from participants, compared to the staged and super common images of MLK. I will further explain my criteria for selecting photographs in the section on data collection.

## Research Context

### Site

Although the purpose of this study is not to produce generalizable findings, readers may want to know about both the uniqueness and representativeness of the research site as they consider the educational implications of this study. In this section, I describe the characteristics of the research site and explain my rationale for selecting it.

The research site for this study is a public high school in the southeastern United States. This school (hereafter referred to as Pioneer High School) is located in a small suburban city with a population of 14,099. This school has a diverse body of students with a total of 36% minority enrollment (for details about the school's demographics, see Figure 1). Students from low-income families make up about 56 % of the enrolled students. The gender ratio was almost 1:1.



*Figure 1. Pioneer High School Demographics*

\* *Note.* This pie chart was created based on demographic data available on the *Greatschools.net* website in August 2018.

Pioneer's student demographics mirror the current U.S. demographics in terms of race and ethnicity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), White Americans (non-Hispanic) are the racial majority, making up about 60.4%; African Americans (Black only) are the largest racial minority, amounting to an estimated 13.4% of the population; Latino or Hispanic Americans amount to an estimated 18.3% of the total U.S. population, making up the largest ethnic minority.

While Pioneer High School seems representative of national demographics in terms of race and ethnicity, its particularity should not be overlooked in terms of its location in the nation. That this school is located in the southeastern United States could matter in two ways. For one thing, the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the sites of some of the major events in the Civil Rights movement (e.g., Montgomery) are not far from this school. Due to this geographical proximity, some students may have learned oral histories relating to the topic of this study. In addition, this region is unique in that it is a part of the Bible Belt. Despite the massive drop in the Christian share of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2015), Christianity still thrives in this region. Every Sunday, the churches are packed with people, from toddlers to senior citizens; it is not uncommon to see college students doing a Bible study at a coffee shop, even on weekdays. The dominance of the Christian population in this region may make for differences in students' representations of religious aspects of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement.

When it comes to pedagogical culture, Pioneer has two important features. At the school level, Pioneer initiated a school-wide campaign to emphasize the values of non-violence and tolerance of difference. One of the purposes of this campaign was to prevent suicide. According to a social studies teacher, the campus culture had significantly changed in a positive way since

this campaign was launched. Although this school-wide program was not directly related to the topic of this study, it could be a useful reference for understanding students' perceptions of challenges that they might face when attempting to display MLK-related images in the school lobby. At the classroom level—particularly in social studies classes—there is one thing to note: social studies teachers have been required to adopt inquiry-based lessons since the 2016-17 academic year. Based on my visits to several social studies classrooms (as a field instructor) and my personal conversations with four different social studies teachers, I observed that the depth of inquiry varied depending on teachers' teaching philosophy and the level of the class; however, I could safely argue that social studies lessons at Pioneer in general put more emphasis on disciplined inquiry and essay writing than learning by rote. Also, students at Pioneer, particularly those in advanced placement (AP) social studies classes, were fairly used to interpreting visual texts, which was advantageous to this study.

I chose Pioneer high school for my study for several reasons. First of all, it was an accessible research site for me. Since I have worked with several social studies teachers at the school as a supervisor, I felt comfortable entering the school as a researcher. Moreover, I thought that my relationship with the mentor teachers would make the process of recruiting research participants smoother. In addition, Pioneer High School had participants that I sought to recruit for this study; I wanted my research participants to be diverse not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but also in terms of socio-economic status because previous research on students' historical understanding had focused on racial differences. Half of Pioneer High School's students were drawn from low-income families, and these students came from various racial or ethnic groups (based on a personal conversation with the school's vice president). Pioneer also had students who were members of racial and ethnic minority groups but were economically

privileged. Therefore, I was able to recruit diverse participants, including White students from the working class, as well as Black and Hispanic students from the middle class.

## **Participants**

I began recruiting participants on October 18, 2018 by inviting students in two social studies teachers' classrooms to take part in my dissertation study. The recruitment process involved three visits. At my first visit, I introduced myself and my study to students and distributed a parental permission form, asking interested students to return this form to their teachers. One week later, I made a second visit in which I asked interested students to fill out an online survey, which was designed to collect participants' demographic information, their availability for interviews, and their preference for grouping. I made a third visit to respond to interested students' questions regarding the research process and to encourage more participation. Later, I reached out to two more social studies teachers to recruit more diverse participants in terms of race and gender.

Instead of relying on teachers' recommendations for research participants, I decided to recruit participants in person for several reasons. First, because one-time interviews are the only data source for this study, I thought that participants' voluntary participation based on genuine interest in the topic of this study would be crucial for obtaining high-quality data. Also, I thought that the students should know who would interview them before deciding whether to participate. Lastly, I felt that meeting the students before the interviews would help to build a rapport that would facilitate interview process.

Through this direct recruitment process, a total of 28 students volunteered to participate in my dissertation study; however, one of them was unable to attend the interview. As Table 4 shows, participants were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic class (for more

information about participants, see Appendix A). Female students were almost three times as numerous as male students. To balance the gender ratio, I tried several methods—for example, I revisited classrooms to recruit more male participants or asked teachers to encourage male students’ participation; but my attempts were not effective.

Table 4  
*Number and Portion of Participants*

| Characteristic                  | Participants |         |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------|
|                                 | Number       | Portion |
| Gender                          |              |         |
| Female                          | 19           | 0.70    |
| Male                            | 7            | 0.26    |
| Other                           | 1            | 0.04    |
| Race or Ethnicity               |              |         |
| White                           | 10           | 0.37    |
| Black                           | 7            | 0.26    |
| Black & White                   | 2            | 0.07    |
| Hispanics                       | 6            | 0.22    |
| Asian                           | 2            | 0.07    |
| Socio-economic Class            |              |         |
| Working Class                   | 4            | 0.15    |
| Situational Poverty             | 4            | 0.15    |
| Risen from Poverty Middle Class | 2            | 0.07    |
| Illusory Middle Class           | 1            | 0.04    |
| Lower Aspiring Middle Class     | 1            | 0.04    |
| Solidly Middle Class            | 10           | 0.37    |
| Upper Middle Class              | 3            | 0.11    |
| I prefer not to answer          | 2            | 0.07    |
| Grade Level                     |              |         |
| Junior                          | 22           | 0.81    |
| Senior                          | 5            | 0.19    |
| Total                           | 27           |         |

*Note.* The demographic information about participants is based on their self-identification in a survey they were given. Students were asked to check one of the twelve socio-economic class categories that the researcher provided. The definition of each category was also provided in the survey. For more details about the socio-economic class categories, see Appendix B.



## **Data Collection**

### **Elicitation Task**

The research questions of this study were examined through semi-structured, open-ended, task-based interviews using MLK-related photographs (a total of eighteen). The elicitation task consisted of three sub-tasks. The same set of eighteen images was used throughout the interviews. In this section, I elaborate on each sub-task and explain its purpose.

The interviews began with a task in which students were asked to say ‘stop’ when they saw an image on the screen that they had frequently seen on or around MLK Day. They were also asked to explain what the image would stand for if it were shown in the context of MLK Day. In the U.S., photographs are among the most popular modern sites of public memory (Lowenthal, 2015; Zerubavel, 1996). Therefore, the first task was designed to explore the public memory of MLK and commemorative narratives of MLK Day that were familiar to students.

In the second part of the elicitation task, I gave each student a printed set of the images that they had seen on the computer screen. Students were asked to take a few minutes to look at the images and read captions carefully and then to write down on the paper the numbers of the images that they thought deserved more attention on MLK Day with an explanation of the reasons for their choices. Students worked on this task individually. Wineburg et al. (2007), in a joint parent-and-child interview using photographs of the Vietnam War, used a similar strategy to overcome “the challenge of arranging an interview with such an imbalance of knowledge.” Although most participants in the present study were at the same grade level (juniors) and a knowledge imbalance among them was not clearly foreseen, I wanted to ensure that each participant had already committed to an interpretation of the photographs through this individual task before engaging in a group discussion. I also intended to use students’ individual responses

to this task as a reference to see if any students' voices might have been unheard in a group discussion because of a power imbalance.

In the last part of this elicitation task, I asked students to choose six out of eighteen images that they wanted to display in the school lobby for the upcoming MLK Day. This task was intentionally directed by using the verb 'want' in order to encourage participants to bring their own desires, interests, and concerns to the task, instead of feeling pressured to tell the "right" or official answer, or what the researcher seemed to expect to hear from them. I also encouraged them to work together on the task by saying, "Let's suppose you are chosen as a team that is preparing for an MLK Day exhibition." After completing the group task, students were asked to explain their choices as well as omissions. Several additional questions were also asked, for example, "If you had been allowed to choose more photos, are there any others that you would want to post in the lobby for MLK day?", "How do these images make you feel?" and "If you displayed these images in the school lobby, do you think there would be any challenges you might face?" (for more information about Interview Protocol, see Appendix C).

### **Photographs**

The elicitation task involved a set of eighteen images depicting MLK himself or events or people related to MLK. I chose images that reflected not only traditional ways of remembering MLK (e.g., MLK delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech) but also critiques of such traditional representations. For instance, some historians, including Howard Zin, have criticized the exclusive focus on MLK, which ignores myriad ordinary people involved in the Civil Rights movement. Some scholars, particularly those positioned on the political left, have lamented the forgotten memory of MLK's radical social vision reflected in the Poor People's Campaign (e.g., Harding, 1987); some object to the common view that MLK's work took place only in the

southern part of the nation (e.g., Theoharis, 2018, April 4); and others criticize the omission of such historical details as MLK's leading role in the anti-Vietnam War movement, the work of White civil rights activists, and the violence committed during non-violent protests (e.g., Wills, 2005).

Consulting such critiques, I initially developed a set of twenty-eight images that encompassed a wide range of perspectives on MLK's vision and diverse historical actors involved in the Civil Rights movement. Then, I narrowed it down to eighteen images based on responses of various people, from professionals such as historians and a museum director to ordinary folks like high school students and staff members at a public library, to the initial set. After carefully observing how they reacted to the images, I finalized a set of eighteen images by choosing those that had provoked "a greater range" and "depth of response", while excluding redundant images (Barton & McCully, 2010, p. 154).

All eighteen images were accompanied by brief captions. Werner (2002) suggests that the reading of an image could be very limited "if viewers submit to the caption's closed authority" (p. 406). As Werner notes, captions could restrain multiple readings. However, captions were necessary for this study because they provided participants with needed information (e.g., historical context) for interpretation. Also, captions played a role in minimizing the impact of students' prior historical knowledge on their choices of images. Although there were a few publicized images that participants could easily recognize without captions (e.g., Rosa Parks), I captioned all the images for consistency (for the captions, see Appendix D).

## **Interviews**

I conducted interviews with eight groups (a total of twenty-seven students) from October 2018 to November 2018. I assigned students from the same race or ethnicity to the same group

based on their self-identification because I was concerned that students might feel uncomfortable talking about sensitive issues such as racial discrimination (some of the images depicted this issue) with students of different races or ethnicities (see Table 5). Previous studies (e.g., Epstein, 2010) showed that students', particularly Black students' understanding of historical events was influenced by whom they talked to; whether the interviewer was Black or White mattered to them. When students checked more than one race or ethnicity, I referred to students' responses to a survey question asking them to share anything that the researcher should consider in grouping. Alternatively, I consulted with their teachers about comfortable groupings for these students. Students' gender was not considered in group assignments. Students were distributed across groups in terms of their self-identified socio-economic class. Although this study did not obtain students' religion, based on the interviews, more than half of the participants self-identified as Christian or Catholic. The group interviews were arranged based on students' availability, and whenever possible, I tried to schedule interviews during their social studies class. The group interviews were conducted in conference rooms in the counselling office, located on the school campus. The conference rooms were blocked from outside interference. Each interview took approximately forty-five to seventy minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded as well as video-recorded. The purpose of videotaping was to record participants' work during the elicitation task.

Table 5  
*Interview Schedule*

| Group       | Participants                            | Date       |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------|------------|
| A: Hispanic | Manuel & Sofia                          | 10/31/2018 |
| B: Black    | Raven, Jasmine, Nia & Jordan            | 11/01/2018 |
| C: White    | Dylan, Katherine, Claire & Emma         | 11/01/2018 |
| D: White    | Molly & Bradley                         | 11/13/2018 |
| E: Hispanic | Isabel, Camilla, Antonio & Raquel       | 11/13/2018 |
| F: White    | Abigail, Colby, Jenna & Heather         | 11/14/2018 |
| G: Black    | Shanice, Tiara, Ebony, Aliyah & Marquis | 11/14/2018 |
| H: Asian    | Indeela & Shu                           | 11/14/2018 |

### **Researcher-Participant Relationship**

In qualitative research, the power imbalance between researcher and researched has been a central concern (for more discussion on this issue, refer to the introduction of the book *Good Guys Don't Wear Hats: Children's Talk about the Media* by Joseph Tobin (2000)). This study cannot be an exception; however, by conducting photo elicitation interviews, I was able to shift the power balance to some degree. According to Harper (2002), “[p]hoto elicitation demonstrate[s] the polysemic quality of the image; it thrusts *images* into the center of a research agenda...Due to its decentering of the authority of the author, photo elicitation addresses some of the postmodernism of ethnography itself” (italicized in original, p. 15). Although I alone determined the topic of this study and developed elicitation tasks and interview questions, I found that participants exerted their authorial agency by interpreting photographs based on their own views and experiences during the interviews.

There is another imbalance between the researcher and the researched in terms of knowledge. Since a researcher has studied a given topic for a long time, he/she could be assumed to know more about the research topic than participants. The researcher's perception of being more knowledgeable than the researched could severely hinder genuine understanding of

participants' perspectives. As a foreigner, my knowledge of MLK was very shallow. Also, I was not familiar with the U.S. culture of MLK Day commemoration or with the history of Civil Rights era in the U.S. However, wondering why his "I Have a Dream" speech, among others, became so popular, and why even Korean students came to learn about MLK and his "I Have a Dream" speech in elementary school, I began to study MLK's life and the history of MLK Day in depth. The more I studied, the more multiple perspectives I came to be exposed to by encountering his lesser-known speeches, writings, and images. I came to realize that MLK was a more complicated and even contentious figure than he was commonly known to be. At the same time, I began to make my own judgements about what ought to be remembered on MLK Day. Thus, I had to make a special effort to listen to my participants' ideas without letting my own deeper knowledge of and opinions about MLK interfere. During the interviews and data analysis, I tried not to presuppose that there was a single right way to commemorate MLK Day and to be open to whatever students expressed, as one of my committee members, Dr. Tobin, advised me. Again, photo elicitation techniques helped me break preexisting frames of understanding MLK and the Civil Rights movement by allowing for students' wider and more creative responses.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Data Sources**

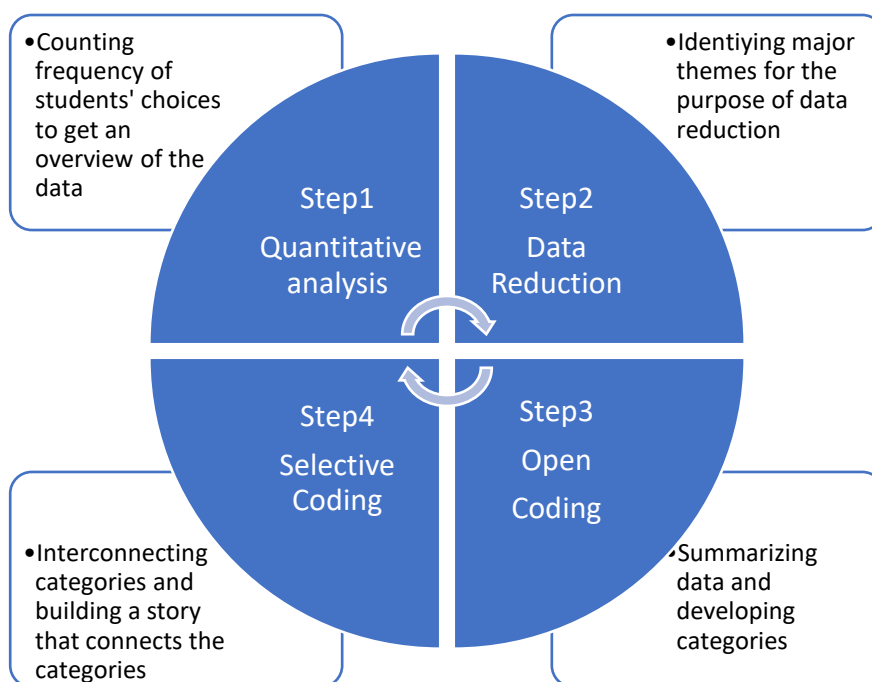
I produced a data set of video recordings and audio recordings by conducting group interviews with participants. For analysis, the audio tapes were transcribed. I entrusted professional transcribers with the task of transcribing, following the transcription convention as shown in Appendix E, because "[t]ranscribing tapes is very time-consuming" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 136), especially for a researcher who is a non-native speaker of the participants' language. While reviewing transcriptions, I preserved colloquialisms (e.g., "y'all" or "gonna")

and grammatically incorrect statements unless they would interfere with the reader's comprehension. I also added in the transcriptions the numbers of the photos that students were indicating while they were talking. Through this process, I generated a 170-page transcription (48,559 words) with the following sections:

- Group A - Hispanic: a 21-page transcription (5623 words)
- Group B - Black: a 24-page transcription (4935 words)
- Group C - White: a 34-page transcription (10036 words)
- Group D - White: a 16-page transcription (4891 words)
- Group E - Hispanic: a 25-page transcription (7039 words)
- Group F - White: an 11-page transcription (2835 words)
- Group G - Black: a 25-page transcription (8900 words)
- Group H - Asian: a 14-page transcription (4300 words)

### **Thematic Analysis of Transcriptions**

For a thematic analysis of the data, I employed the following analytical process (see Figure 2). I took each step sequentially, but I often revisited the earlier steps to make sense of the data.



*Figure 2. Procedure for Thematic Analysis of Transcriptions*

In the first step, I conducted a basic quantitative analysis of the data by counting the frequencies of students' choices of images in each of the three tasks. Then I displayed the results in an Excel file. I also arranged images for each task in rank order, and then compared these images visually within each task as well as across tasks. This basic level of quantitative analysis of the data and visual display of its results provided me with an important perspective on students' ideas in many ways. First, the images that students chose for the MLK Day exhibition (task 3) were a combination of the most popular images honoring MLK Day (task 1) and the images that they thought deserved more attention on MLK Day (task 2). Also, students' responses as a group (task 3) reflected students' individual responses (task 2), which implied that the results of task 3 did not overrepresent the ideas of a few dominant or outspoken students within a group. This step also allowed me to make a quick comparison of students' choices between racial or ethnic groups. Regarding frequencies of chosen images, there were no



significant racial or ethnic differences. Lastly, but not least importantly, this initial analysis of the data helped me decide on the focus of my preliminary review of the transcriptions. While frequently chosen images gave me a good overview, the data was meaningless without an understanding of why students chose those images. Therefore, I decided to pay attention to students' explanations about their choices of the top six images (see Table 6) while reading the whole transcription.

Table 6  
*Top Six Images Chosen for the MLK Day Exhibition across Groups*

| Rank | Image                                                                               | Frequency<br>(N = 8 groups)                                    | Themes                                                                                                                  |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    |    | Total 7<br>- Black 2<br>- Hispanic 1<br>- White 3<br>- Asian 1 | Black, White and Latino/a together/<br>MLK as an advocate for everybody                                                 |
| 2    |    | Total 5<br>- Hispanic 1<br>- Black 1<br>- White 3              | Struggle at a personal level/ not all<br>Whites were against Blacks (focusing<br>on the White person who aided<br>MLK). |
| 2    |   | Total 5<br>- Hispanic 2<br>- White 1<br>- Black 1<br>- Asian 1 | Accomplishment, MLK's influence                                                                                         |
| 3    |  | Total 4<br>- Hispanic 2<br>- White 2                           | Religion (MLK's religious faith, the<br>tie between religion and the<br>movement), character (humility)                 |
| 3    |  | Total 4<br>- Black 2<br>- White 1<br>- Asian 1                 | Struggle and hardship that African<br>Americans experienced as a group,<br>process for democratic social change         |
| 3    |  | Total 4<br>- Hispanic 1<br>- Black 1<br>- White 1<br>- Asian 1 | White supporter, sacrifice, tragedy                                                                                     |

In the third step, I analyzed the transcriptions by employing coding methods. In this open coding phase, I implemented two coding cycles, following Saldaña (2016): First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. While “First Cycle coding methods are codes initially assigned to the data units,” “Second Cycle coding methods generally [work] with the resulting First Cycle codes themselves” (Miles et. al., 2014, p. 64).

For First Cycle coding, I used In Vivo Coding. Miles and et al (2014) suggests that “In Vivo Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 65). I considered In Vivo Coding a good coding tool for this dissertation study because one of its goals is to make students’ voices heard. In Vivo Coding uses “words or short phrases from the participants’ own language in the data record as codes” (p. 65). Thus, as I read the transcriptions line by line, I coded them using students’ own words as codes. A total of 631 initial codes were generated using the In Vivo Coding method; some of the example codes are listed in Table 7. Then, as I read over and over these initial codes, I developed the second codes by grouping interrelated codes into a new category. I repeatedly constructed and deconstructed categories until finalizing a second set of codes (a total of 50). Sometimes more than one code was assigned to one In Vivo code. Also, for easier retrieval and distinction, I added signs such as (+) and (-) before some Pattern Codes; (+) indicates a reason why students chose to include an image and (-) represents a rationale for excluding an image. Table 7 shows some examples of the second codes.

Table 7  
*Examples of Codes Developed in the First Cycle Coding*

| The First Cycle: In Vivo Coding                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Initial Codes                                                                                                                                                                                                  | The Second Codes                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was fighting for all</li> <li>• It was for everybody</li> <li>• Shows that the Civil Rights movement wasn't just a Black thing</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (+) for all</li> </ul>         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel like the hardships are important too</li> <li>• Show that he faced violence every single time</li> <li>• Represent the hurt that was felt by the hatred</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (+) struggle</li> </ul>        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There's another side to White people</li> <li>• Because even though he was White</li> <li>• Not every single White person back then was evil</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (+) White supporter</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The only thing she knows is that he gave a speech</li> <li>• They would rather like the happy stuff</li> <li>• We mainly talk about White people culture</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique</li> </ul>            |

For Second Cycle coding, I developed Pattern Codes that were inferential or explanatory by pulling together some of the second codes into “more meaningful units of analysis” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 79). Miles et al explains that “First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data” whereas “Pattern Coding, as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of *categories, themes, or concepts*” (p. 79). I found that codes beginning with (+) took up about 50 % of the second set of codes. Also, since my research interest lies in students’ explanations about their chosen images, I decided to focus on categorizing the second codes with the (+) symbol. These codes were reorganized into seven clusters based on likeness in terms of themes that students wanted to present using a particular image (see Table 8). I developed Pattern Codes that were representative of each cluster’s

characteristics and assigned them to each group as its name. The clusters were numbered according to how frequently their themes were discussed. In other words, the themes represented in Clusters 1-4 were much more frequently discussed by students than those in Clusters 5-7.

Table 8  
*Pattern Codes Developed in the Second Cycle Coding*

| Cluster | Pattern Codes                                           | The Second Codes                                                                                                               |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Accomplishments of MLK and the Civil Rights movement    | (+) accomplishment, (+) his impact, (+) his importance, (+) international recognition, (+) national recognition, (+) milestone |
| 2       | Tough process for achieving civil rights                | (+) process, (+) struggle, (+) sacrifice                                                                                       |
| 3       | MLK's advocacy for a wide range of people               | (+) for all, (+) his vision, (+) international influence                                                                       |
| 4       | Diversity of supporters                                 | (+) diversity, (+) supporter, (+) White supporter, (+) unity                                                                   |
| 5       | MLK's admirable character                               | (+) character, (+) his action                                                                                                  |
| 6       | MLK's religion and the role of religion in the movement | (+) religion                                                                                                                   |
| 7       | Power of ordinary people                                | (+) ordinary, (+) her strength                                                                                                 |

It should be noted that there were five codes that were not associated with any of the seven clusters: (+) full story, (+) powerful image, (+) thought provoking, (+) unknown, and (+) well-known. Although these codes were associated with the reasons why students chose a particular image, they were not directly related to characteristics of either people or events depicted in the images. Among these five codes, (+) full story was particularly important because

it showed students' intention to give a more complete story of the past, and it was an overarching theme in students' responses across different racial and ethnic groups. A few students chose a certain image because they thought the image was thought-provoking, powerful, unknown, or well-known; however, this tendency was minor and less relevant to the content of the images.

In the last step, I conducted selective coding by working with the Pattern Codes that I had developed in the previous step. According to Creswell (2007), “[g]rounded theory provides a procedure for developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a ‘story’ that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)” (p. 160). Although this dissertation study does not share its goal with grounded theory (e.g., generating propositions or hypotheses), its analytical procedures helped me to make sense of the data and to build a story to tell readers.

Following what Strauss and Corbin called “selective coding,” I paid attention to how the Pattern Codes were interrelated with one another while reading corresponding transcriptions. What I found was that students often critiqued the way MLK Day has been commemorated in the US and the way MLK and the Civil Rights movement has been taught, particularly when they talked about the themes of Clusters 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. For instance, students often pointed out that schools did not show them the images of struggle, or that they never talked about Latino participants in the Civil Rights movement. In other words, students often juxtaposed how they wanted to represent MLK and the Civil Rights movement with how schools or society represented the figure and the event. Specifically, there were emerging pairs such as “Accomplish vs Struggle” (Clusters 1 & 2), “MLK as Black Advocate vs MLK as Everyone’s Advocate” (Clusters 3 & 4), “MLK as a civil rights leader vs MLK as a religious leader”

(Clusters 5 & 6) , “Powerful figure vs Ordinary people” (Clusters 1 & 7). When I checked whether this tendency appeared consistently across different racial/ethnic groups, I found that the first two pairs were more consistently salient. Thus, this dissertation tells a story of participants’ engagement with MLK-related photos, with a focus on “Accomplish vs Struggle” and “MLK as Black Advocate vs MLK as Everyone’s Advocate.” I present the story of the second pair in Chapter Four, “Making the story more inclusive”, and the story of the first pair in Chapter Five, “Embracing the dark side”.

### **Considerations**

The unit of analysis for this study was mostly individual remarks made during the group interviews. However, I also treated short dialogues among group members as the subject of analysis. In doing so, I sometimes made comparisons between different racial or ethnic groups. Although participants were grouped based on their self-identified race or ethnicity, any explanations regarding racial or ethnic differences found in this study should not be considered firm conclusions about the differences between the groups because “explicit comparisons are usually not very productive in a small-scale qualitative study” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 98). Any comparisons made in this study should be further investigated through a comparative research study with a larger number of more representative samples.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAKING THE STORY MORE INCLUSIVE

*Aliyah (a Black female): And I feel like everybody thinks there's just two sides to a story, the White perspective and the Black perspective. But in these pictures, you get more than that, you see in-depth descriptions of what he [MLK] did. And how life was back then because many people think it was only about the White and Black but there's different races involved.*

*Claire (a White female): Well, that's what I liked about this one [P7], the caption talked about there being, like, large amounts of Latinos who participated, because, I feel like we talk about it being a thing about like Whites and Blacks, but not like, Latinos—I think that's really important to talk about.*

*Emma (a White female): Just because, many people think of this whole era, kind of thing, it's like, Whites vs. Blacks, but it wasn't ALL Whites vs. Blacks.*

This chapter focuses on students' efforts to add diversity and complexity to the story of the Civil Rights movement. As Aliyah, Claire and Emma mentioned above, many students in the present study were used to talking about the Civil Rights era in terms of “Black vs. White.” However, they did not simply reproduce the usual way of narrating the Civil Rights story when they were asked to choose photos for the MLK Day exhibition. Rather, students actively moved beyond this oversimplification by including other people of color under oppression and some White supporters among their choices. Students also wanted to let others know that MLK fought not just for the Black community but for everyone. In students' explanations, it was apparent that their inclusion of a variety of historical actors was intended to tell their potential audience a more comprehensive story of the recent past. Yet, at the same time, some students' comments brought to the surface the subtle tension between telling a more inclusive story and keeping focused on the Black freedom struggle.



In the findings section, I elaborate different kinds of inclusion that were found in students' final sets of images for the MLK Day exhibition. In presenting the findings, I try to contextualize students' ideas by describing delicately nuanced differences in students' explanations for their choices between groups as well as within groups. Then, in the discussion section, I attempt to make sense of students' intentions to add more diversity and complexity to the Civil Rights story by drawing on previous studies and various theories such as 1) Gills' (1996) accounts of the interplay between identity and memory, 2) Bakhtin's (1981) notion of ideological becoming and of utterances as citation, and 3) de Certeau's (1984) concept of tactics of the weak.

## **Findings**

### **MLK's Advocacy for a Wide Range of People**

One of the most frequently mentioned lessons that students expected their audience would learn from their chosen photos was that MLK fought not just for the Black community but for everyone. Yet students' emphasis on MLK's advocacy for a wide range of people did not necessarily imply a denial of MLK's advocacy for the Black community. Rather, many students wanted to show "a broader spectrum than just the African-American," as Molly, a White female, said. Many students in the present study attempted to provide their audience with a more comprehensive understanding of MLK by including diverse populations for whom MLK advocated. However, there were also nuanced differences in their explanations for such inclusions between different racial or ethnic groups as well as within the same groups. In what follows, I present the findings from my analysis of students' comments regarding the range of people MLK supported, while paying attention to the role of identity in shaping their ideas as well as the subtle tensions found in their discussion.

Not surprisingly, some Hispanic and Asian students emphasized that MLK fought for different races and ethnicities, and their identity as an ethnic minority group seemed to lead them to include the corresponding photos in their final set of images. For instance, Manuel, a Hispanic male, let out exclamations of delight at the caption of the photo of the Poor People's Campaign, "Huh, Latino farmers!?" Then he added, "I should put that one." Later, Manuel further explained, "I was reading this one [P18], and it went back to Latinos, and there was also Latinos getting oppressed, and other people of color—not just Black people." Manuel also pointed to this photo when asked if there were any photos that he felt a personal connection to. He explained his choice by saying, "Just 'cause I didn't realize how, um, you know, it's focusing on the Latino farmers rights activists, and how, like, Martin Luther King wanted to help Hispanics too."

Similarly, Shu, an Asian student, paid attention to other minority groups in explaining her inclusion of the photo of the Poor People's Campaign, commenting, "Yeah, I talked about how important [it is] that discrimination doesn't only exist between Blacks and Whites, but also in different minorities and different races." Agreeing with Shu, Indeela, an Asian female, added that she wanted the audience to learn from her MLK exhibition that "he [MLK] didn't fight just for a certain color. He fought for everyone and even accepted White people to join into his protests."

Manuel, Shu, and Indeela all belong to ethnically marginalized groups, both in the school and in the larger society. Their shared identity as ethnic minorities could be considered the crucial factor explaining their common emphasis on MLK's advocacy for non-Black people of color. However, variations within the ethnic minority groups should not be overlooked. Although Sofia, paired with Manuel in the same interview group, was also Hispanic, unlike Manuel, she was neither attentive to nor connected to the photo of the Poor People's Campaign showing

MLK's advocacy for Latino farmers' rights activists. The fact that Manuel self-identified as working class whereas Sofia identified herself as upper middle class might explain Sofia's relatively indifferent reaction to MLK's advocacy for Latino farmers' rights activists. Yet, socio-economic class was not the only difference between Manuel and Sofia. Sofia's previous experience with a local event honoring MLK Day could help explain the difference between her reaction and Manuel's. According to Sofia, in January, she went down to Atlanta with a small group of her church members (it was a Hispanic-dominant church) to participate in a community service project where she listened to some speeches about MLK, saw pictures representing how Blacks were discriminated against, and then cleaned up at some parks. She further commented, "We do it as like a tribute to him." In responding to my question of whether the photograph of Bloody Sunday frequently appeared in or around MLK Day, Sofia explained, "Not frequently a lot. But I have seen that image around on that day. Because we try to bring awareness to how it was back then. And I see that image to show like how the police treated all the Black people and stuff."

Despite such differences within the group, it is fairly understandable that some Hispanic and Asian students often emphasized the idea that MLK did not just fight for the Black community. However, in the present study, the Black groups also wanted to let others know about MLK's support for various groups of people. They often critiqued the common misconception of MLK as an advocate for Blacks only, although it wasn't clear whether they themselves also had such a misconception. Shanice, for instance, commented,

I would say that Martin Luther King was not a Black person advocate, well I guess he was, but he was more for everyone and I think the misconception is he was more of a fighter for Black rights but he really just wanted equal. Kind of like

Black Lives Matter movement. People think that it's just saying Black people are better but it's not. And that's not what he was trying to either. He was just saying to be equal.

Shanice's comment helps us contextualize the emphasis of Black students on MLK's advocacy for everyone in the current political time. While highlighting the common misconception of MLK as a Black person's advocate, Shanice expressed her concern over the public misunderstanding about the Black Lives Matter movement in the present day. Shanice was also using MLK's pursuit of equality as a reference to provide a better explanation about the agenda of the Black Lives Matter movement. When asked about what MLK would like to say to our generation if he were still alive, Shanice more explicitly connected MLK to the current tension around the Black Lives Matter movement:

I think there are some extremists. I feel like everyone in the Black Lives Matter isn't like that. Of course, there are. It's naive to think there aren't, but I feel like everyone isn't. And I feel like if Martin Luther King was alive that whole movement would've been more understood. Just having someone really explain it and someone that a lot of people actually do respect. I feel like if he was alive, he probably wouldn't be as big and as well liked versus now. It's I'm not gonna say forced because it's not for me but for other people to all like Martin Luther King.

While admitting the existence of some extremists in the Black Lives Matter movement, Shanice still lamented the lack of understanding about the movement among the public. When it came to the hypothetical influence of MLK on the present day, Shanice was taking a somewhat ambivalent stance; she seemed optimistic in saying "the whole movement would've been more understood" or "a lot of people actually do respect," yet at the same time, she seemed pessimistic

in saying “he probably wouldn’t be as big and as well liked versus now.” Based on her comments, it seemed clear Shanice’s emphasis on MLK’s advocacy for everyone was reflective of her hope for the Black Lives Matter movement to be better understood. Her hope explains why she so stressed that MLK was for everyone although she thought he was a Black person’s advocate, and racism against Blacks still mattered. At the same time, Shanice’s ambivalence between hope and despair reveals a somewhat pessimistic perception of today’s political atmosphere regarding racial issues.

Such consideration of the particular political and historical context of the present day helps to better understand other Black students’ comments, too. Agreeing with Shanice’s emphasis on MLK’s advocacy for everyone, Marquis and Tiara further tried to clear up people’s confusion about MLK’s vision by contrasting it with that of Malcom X. They stressed that MLK’s vision was not like that of the Black Panthers and Malcom X. Tiara also said, “I always feel like whenever people go, ‘MLK was y’all’s figure head.’ And I’m like, not really, he was everyone’s.” In a later part of the interview, Ebony, another member of this Black group, even critiqued the Black community’s monopoly on MLK: “I feel like the Black community, also it’s not just other people, they try to take the holiday on as theirs so they don’t recognize or see it as he wanted unity, he wanted rights for the Black community, but he wanted it, unity for all races.” The comments by Tiara, Marquis, and Ebony highlight the division within the Black community: those who would monopolize MLK as a hero only for Blacks versus those who support MLK’s vision encompassing other people of color and poor people, though it was unclear where the students’ ideas about such distinctions came from. In fact, the tension between such contrasting factions within the Black community existed even in MLK’s lifetime (Alridge, 2006; Harding, 1987). It was obvious that Marquis, Tiara, and Ebony distanced MLK from the Black Panthers

and Malcom X, highlighting MLK's advocacy for everyone; it was not still clear whether these Black students themselves supported MLK's vision, though. The findings of this study at least showed that Tiara had a concern about Black separatism and considered this an obstacle to garnering public support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Tiara said:

I feel like if he was alive right now, he would be more like, okay there's a lot of tension right now. And I feel like it's not only like one side, not provoking but there's sometimes where you just didn't have to do that. Okay I'm sorry I have an example. I was watching something and they were doing a Black Lives Matter march. And this White lady had her mixed kids with her because her husband is Black, and she brought them to the march, she's got Black kids. So, they get to the march, and they tell the mom to leave the kids and go back to the car because she's not Black. That's too far. That's in my opinion. When you're doing it right back, in no way does that help us in where we're trying to go. That mom, she can't be here because her kids are Black and she's not. That's just too far.

Tiara attempted to make a constructive critique of the extreme case she had observed in the Black Lives Matter movement on TV. In doing so, she explained she was not trying to provoke anyone, as if she seemed aware of the division over such inclusion issues within the Black community.

So far, I have elaborated on the different nuances in students' reasons for emphasizing MLK's advocacy for everyone. In what follows, I present White students' ideas regarding the diversity of MLK's vision. In the present study, some White students also explained their choice by noting that MLK did not just fight for Blacks. For instance, Heather, a White female, said, "We mentioned [P7] seven was really important because it shows that of the different ethnicities

and all races that all came to support Martin Luther King that it wasn't just specific to African Americans that he wanted everyone to have rights.” Molly, a White female, also said, “He's fighting for himself and everybody else involved. When he started this movement and started this whole phenomenon or whatever, he wasn't just doing it for himself. He was doing it for everybody else who needed it and who was affected by what was going on.”

One thing worthy to note among the White students' comments regarding MLK's advocacy for everybody is Katherine's remark because her comment shows the influence of socio-economic class in the meaning making of MLK's vision. Katherine, a White female who identified her social class as “situational poverty,” explained that she chose the photo of the Poor People's Campaign “because it shows that the Civil Rights movement wasn't just a Black—like a Black-led movement, or a Black-centered—it wasn't centered around just giving rights to African Americans, it was like, for everybody.” Her other comments made it even more clear that she liked MLK's expanded support specifically for poor people. Pointing to the photo of the “I am a man” protest, Katherine said,

I really liked, where's the—this one [P17], 'cause it shows that it's not just a—  
'cause all we really talk about it is "separate but equal," but we don't ever talk  
about the poor working conditions, low wages, the endless cycle of poverty—we  
never talk about that.

In this comment, Katherine complained about the exclusive focus given to MLK's work for racial equality while ignoring his interest in poverty issues. She further complained by saying “we just never really learned about working conditions, and like, low wages and poverty and all that. We never really talked about how that was protested...” She also mentioned that the minimum wage really bothered her these days. Based on her comments, it seemed clear that

Katherine's current socio-economic class was closely related to her preference for the photos of the Poor People's Campaign or of the "I am a man" protest.

However, this finding should not be exploited to support a sort of socio-economic class determinism in students' meaning making of historical figures. Dylan, a member of Katherine's group, also self-identified as belonging to the "situational poverty" class, but he did not react the same way to the photos showing MLK's support for poor people. Also, among the eight students who identified their socio-economic class as either "working class" or "situational poverty," only Katherine and Raquel (a Hispanic female) explained their selections by noting the importance of talking about how working poor working conditions were protested.

In fact, in the present study, students' encounters with a wide range of MLK-related photos helped them see the broader spectrum of people MLK advocated for. However, their broadening of this spectrum was often limited to racial or ethnic diversity rather than socio-economic class. Students' primary concerns regarding MLK Day seemed focused on racial or ethnic equality. For instance, not only the photo of marchers joining hands, but also the "I am a man" photo and the Poor People's Campaign photo led to a broadening of students' understanding of MLK's vision; however, the latter two photos were chosen less frequently. Even when choosing the photo of the Poor People's Campaign, some students of color tended to focus more on the latter half of the phrase "low-income people of different races and ethnicities" in the caption of the photo. In addition, students prioritized the photos addressing the domestic issues over the photo of MLK's participation in the anti-Vietnam War protest and the photo of MLK at the celebration for Ghana's Independence. In short, although it was widely acknowledged by students that MLK advocated for people of color in other colonized countries as well as poor people in the U.S., these groups were often relegated to the margins when limited



space was given to students for the exhibition, suggesting that students perceived MLK's vision as essentially centered on racial or ethnic equality in domestic affairs.

### **A Variety of People Joined the Civil Rights Movement**

While the previous section focused on students' attempts to include diverse groups of people for whom MLK advocated, this section sheds lights on students' inclusion of various racial and ethnic groups involved in the Civil Rights movement. This section elaborates students' justifications for such inclusions as well as some students' concerns over perceived underrepresentation of Latino marchers and White supporters in the Civil Rights story. This section also highlights the tension around displaying White civil rights activists, which was sensed in the both Black and White students' discussion.

Some Hispanics and White students underscored that Latinos/as were also part of the Civil Rights movement. The students explained their choice of the photo of marchers joining hands by noting the importance of representing Latino participants. In their discussions of this photo, the students often pointed out that not just Blacks, but also Whites and Latinos/as came together to support MLK. However, I sensed some different nuances between the latter two groups in their comments. While Whites were described as unexpected supporters for Blacks, Latinos/as were seen as more than just supporters. Latinos/as, as an ethnic minority group, were rather seen as protesters for their own freedom and rights.



*Figure 3.* The photo of marchers holding hands. This photo captures marchers in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. Nearly 250,000 people took part in the march, including 60,000 White participants. Among the participants, there were also thousands of Latinos. Image downloaded from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/fall-museum-preview-photographs-of-the-march-on-washington-and-more/2013/09/04/ce3b1d46-0b39-11e3-8974-f97ab3b3c677\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9da9efcf18bb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/fall-museum-preview-photographs-of-the-march-on-washington-and-more/2013/09/04/ce3b1d46-0b39-11e3-8974-f97ab3b3c677_story.html?utm_term=.9da9efcf18bb) in September 2018.

The students' emphasis on Latino/a marchers often reflected their concerns about the invisibility of Latinos/as in the story of the Civil Rights movement that they had heard. For instance, Claire, a White female, said, "Well, that's what I liked about this one [P7], the caption talked about there being, like, large amounts of Latinos who participated, because, I feel like we talk about it being a thing about like Whites and Blacks, but not like, Latinos—I think that's really important to talk about." In a later part of the interview, Claire further elaborated on the importance of showing the presence of Latino/a marchers to older children by saying:

...'cause, right, there's so much, like, thinking about, like, not just (( really )) our school, but just people I know—there's a lot of, like, ignorance and just like, like misunderstanding almost—not like they—there's just a lot that gets glossed over, and I think that it's so important to go back and be like, "Hey, like, this

happened." Because thinking about this image [P7], and, how you specifically talked about, like, um, Latinos in this, like, description, I guess, and I was thinking about how it's so important for them to know that they were a part of it too. 'Cause like, I didn't know that, and I know that, like—I guess I'm more susceptible to this, because now I take a class full of, like, native speakers, but, it's really—I think it's important for them to know that they're included, because, I definitely thought that the Civil Rights movement was all about White people and Black people.

Critiquing the absence of Latinos/as in the Civil Rights movement narrative, Claire wanted to present Latino/a marchers in their own right, and she suggested how important it was for Latino/a students to know they were also a part of the freedom struggle. Agreeing with Claire, Katherine, a White female, expanded the discussion by pointing to a perceived omission of Latin Americans from the social studies curriculum:

Katherine: Yeah, well, honestly, if you think about it, like, even right now, we're learning about like, pre-Civil War, right? I have literally not heard one thing about Latin American people, like at all, or like, really we talk about natives to an extent, like Native Americans, to an extent, until they're like, basically all sent away, and then we talk about like, two different things—it's the same thing with other cultures, basically.

Claire: Well, it's exactly the same thing, is that we kind of like, not marginalize them, but we clump them into one group, and they're not individuals, and I think it's so important to pull them out and

look at them as people, and not as, "Oh, the Native Americans did this," "Oh, the Latino population did this"—it's about, "this person did that," "Oh, that person did that."

Katherine: Which, that's kind of how we talk about this—we just kind of lump them together, or then we just decide not to speak about them, if they're not like, I don't know, if there's not like some humongous thing happening with them, like the Trail of Tears, or, you know, um, the Gold Rush, then like, we just do not talk about like, them at all, so it's just like, you know—even like, if it was something small, just like, oh, some Latin Americans fought with—er, um, I don't know, the North, to help with this, or blah-blah, whatever that would be important. I mean, maybe they didn't, I don't know. Again, I don't know, because we don't talk about it! But, yeah.

Claire and Katherine believed their social studies curriculum was problematic, especially regarding its treatment of Latin Americans and other minority groups. From their perspective, schools almost entirely excluded Latino/a and other minority groups from U.S. history or covered them very briefly while treating them as groups without further distinctions within the groups. The discussion between Claire and Katherine above also implies that their inclusion of Latino/a marchers in the MLK Day exhibition forms a part of their effort to make US history more inclusive.

Similarly, Raquel, a Hispanic female, critiqued what she perceived as a curricular absence of Latin Americans. She provided more details about what she thought schools omitted

from the Civil Rights curriculum, drawing on her prior knowledge obtained through watching the documentary film titled “King in the Wilderness” at her home:

...The Farm Workers Movement, the farmers, Cesar Chavez, and everything. That was happening at the same time that the Civil Rights movement was happening. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta and everybody, they were like talking to Martin Luther King. He went to some of their meetings and he spoke for them, and you don't really learn about that at school and that kind of shows that they were all in this together. They helped each other. The one picture of there, it says there were some Hispanics are Puerto Ricans. It was kind of like a thing for everybody.

Raquel clearly noted the connection between MLK and Latino/a civil rights activists; however, she claimed that schools did not teach about that. She used the photo elicitation task as an opportunity to craft a set of images that would address this problem by including the photo featuring Puerto Rican participants in the Washington March.

Some students even further attempted to diversify the Civil Rights story by paying attention to the presence of White supporters. Pointing to the previous misconception that “all Whites were against Blacks during the Civil Rights era,” the students wanted to make distinctions within the White group. Not surprisingly, several White students complained about that misconception. The White students’ complaints about the misrepresentation of their own race might be seen as defensive. However, their comments about stereotypical images of Whites were echoed in other racial or ethnic groups’ interviews, and these other groups were just as interested in correcting misrepresentations of White people during the Civil Rights era. Yet,

some differences in their justifications for including White supporters were observed between the Black and White groups.

To represent the idea that “Not all Whites were against Blacks,” students frequently chose photos that featured White supporters, for example, the photo of marchers joining hands, the photo of MLK getting hit with a rock, and the photo of James Reeb. One White group discussed the photo of MLK getting hit with a rock as follows:

Interviewer: What about this one [P15]?

Bradley: I think maybe people will figure out in that image, they're like, "Oh, not every single White person back then was evil. " There were people back then that had hearts.

Molly: Because the way it's taught and the way we depict it, is like it was all White people against the Black people.

Bradley: Yeah.

Molly: We didn't really learn about there was being White people supporting the Black people.

Bradley: And you never hear about that, ever.

To these White students, the rock-hitting photo seemed like a great counterexample to the common misunderstanding that all Whites were against Blacks. Also, they seemed to believe schools in part were responsible for producing this misunderstanding.



*Figure 4.* The photo of MLK getting hit with a rock. This photo captures aides keeping MLK down to protect him from further attacks. MLK was hit by a rock as he led a march protesting housing discrimination in an all-White neighborhood in Chicago, IL, on August 5, 1966. Image downloaded from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/188447565630090960> in September 2018.

Interestingly, Hispanic students made an almost identical point as they discussed the rock-hitting photo.

Manuel: And with the last one [P15], it just goes back to showing that White people are protecting him, 'cause someone threw a rock, and they hit him, and that these people are standing up and shielding him from the violence that these people are trying to show—that these people were showing, I mean.

Interviewer: Hm. So, also, both of you want to show that there were different groups of White Americans back then?

Manuel: Yeah, I—showing there were two sides.

Interviewer: Two sides? So, you want to present two sides?

Sofia: Yeah. Because most people, you know, I think back then, they think of how against White people were, and that they were very

violent, but I want to show like also that everyone can come together and support Martin Luther King Jr., because what he did was pretty much for everyone.

Interviewer: Mm.

Manuel: Because we have like, implanted their heads that all White people were against, or, we have that idea, and that—some of these pictures just show that, like, the past three, like, the reverend—they just show how some people, or the White—there's another side to White people, is what I'm trying to say. That were in support, but were scared, or...

Manuel's description of the aid featured in the rock-hitting photo was exceptionally detailed. Interestingly, Manuel and many other students paid more attention to the background of this photo than to its central subject—MLK. Furthermore, they had a very keen eye to notice that the helpers were White. Honestly, I had not anticipated that students would interpret the photo in this way. Based on students' comments, I could assume that students' focus on the White helpers was in part because of the striking contrast between the scene in the photo and their previous perception of White people during the Civil Rights era. In the conversation above, Sofia even mentioned that she thought that Whites were not only against Blacks but also very violent. According to Manuel, the idea that all White people were against Blacks was "implanted" into people's heads, although he did not specify the agent.

Students' stereotypes about White people living in the Civil Rights era were even more apparent in their response to the photo of James Reeb, a White minister who was beaten to death during the Selma March. Students automatically assumed that he would be an oppressor. For



example, Antonio, a Hispanic male, said, “Wasn’t he one of the directors of the police stations?” None of the students ever imagined that the White guy in the photo could be a supporter until they read the photo’s caption. According to the students, most of them claimed they had never heard about White civil rights activists, including James Reeb, either in or out of school. For instance, Jasmine, a Black female, complained about the forgotten memory of James Reeb, saying, “Everybody knows of Rosa Parks, but nobody’s ever heard of him.” Meanwhile, there were a few students who had a vague knowledge of White civil rights activists, mainly obtained through unofficial channels such as movies. For example, Nia, a Black female, said, “But I had heard of another White dude, I think it’s like the bus boycott, how he was the first one off the bus, the Freedom Riders, I think. That’s the only White man I’ve ever heard of.”



*Figure 5.* The photo of Rev. James Reeb. James Reeb (38), Boston Unitarian minister, was beaten to death by five White men after he joined protests for African Americans’ voting rights in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965. He was one of the ministers who answered a call from MLK, for religious leaders from all over the country to join him in Selma after the violent confrontation. Image downloaded from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2011/07/17/letter-from-selma/hsjPWW3tqnTDLPFJhusOfM/story.html> in September 2018.

According to Raquel, a Hispanic female, who demonstrated her exceptional familiarity with MLK’s life throughout the interview, James Reeb was one of the five clergymen who

answered MLK's call to join the Selma march. Raquel thought that because there were very few Whites who stood up for what they believed in, James Reeb should be remembered. For similar reasons, 15 out of 27 students picked the photo of James Reeb when they were individually asked to choose a photo that they thought deserved more attention on MLK Day; this photo was ranked first in the individual task. In the group task, four out of eight groups included this photo in their final set of images; interestingly, the choice of this photo was evenly spread across all groups—White, Hispanic, Black and Asian.

Although the photo of James Reeb was favored by many students, some of them seemed hesitant to include this photo in their final set of images for the MLK Day exhibition because they were unsure about his relevance to MLK Day. For instance, Claire, a White female, said, "I liked it, but I don't know that, for the sake of this, it's necessary. For like this assignment [pose]". However, in a later part of the interview when asked if there were any more photos that they wanted to add, Claire's group pointed to the photo of James Reeb in a cautious manner. The conversation between Claire and Katherine tells us not only why they thought it important to remember James Reeb, but also how they thought he should be remembered. Also, their comments reveal a tension around his inclusion in the story of the Civil Rights movement. Katherine, a White female, was aware of the importance of not Whitewashing the story of the Civil Rights movement, saying, "So I think, I mean, I know, like it is important to not, like, Whitewash this thing, but it is, like—it is part of, like, you know—just because he's White doesn't mean he wasn't important to the movement." Agreeing with Katherine, Claire added, "...so just to like, not idolize, but kind of, enshrine, this man, like with MLK, I think is important because he was willing to stand up with him, when very few people were." Throughout the interview, Katherine reconfirmed that her intention to present the photo of James Reeb was not

Whitewashing, and Claire expressed her positive perception of her school culture, saying, “the community here would be accepting of these images.” Nevertheless, Katherine and Claire had to admit the possibility that the photo of James Reeb could be read as Whitewashing by some people when Emma, a White female, pointed out the worst case: “I mean, I kind of feel like, maybe in this image [P12], just—from a hostile point, maybe some people would pursue it as Whitewashing—.” This conversation showed us the tension that Katherine and Claire felt between their awareness of a larger discourse about the overrepresentation of Whites in history and their desire to honor a White civil rights leader. This tension seemed higher when realizing the inclusion of the White man could be viewed as pushing against the larger discourse.

The tension between being inclusive and not Whitewashing the Civil Rights story was also sensed in the Black students’ discussion below. Furthermore, their discussion helps us understand why some students of color were concerned about the potential challenge of displaying of a White civil rights leader. In the following conversation, a group of Black students talk about the photo of James Reeb:

Raven: I kind of like this one too [P12].

Jasmine: Yeah, I like that too, because even though he was White-

Raven: Yeah, he was White [crosstalk]-

Jasmine: They beat him for [crosstalk]-

Raven: Because he accepted the Black people, and so they beat him.

Jasmine: Yeah. And he died.

Nia: Because I think, even a White people protest, we don't think they were the ones who got beaten, but they as well were beaten too because they were seen as Negro lovers, like they used to say back

then, and they didn't like them either. It shows how Whites were willing to die for our race too.

Raven: Some.

Nia: Yeah, some.

Jasmine: Some (blinking her eyes)

Nia: Some (showing both of her palms toward Jasmine).

These Black students seemed surprised not only that some Whites sacrificed themselves for Blacks but also that even Whites could have been beaten. Nia explained why James Reeb was beaten to death by referring to the epithet “Negro lover.” To many students of color in the present study, it was a shocking fact that White people could be in danger when they were perceived as “Negro lovers.” Their encounter with this historical fact sometimes led them to have empathy towards Whites living in the Civil Rights era. For example, Sofia, a Hispanic female, said, “I think it actually shows how White people were, like, scared to speak up and to support it, because of this, like people backlashing, because how against it they were...” Yet, at the same time, the students of color were concerned about the potential challenge when attempting to present the photo of James Reeb in the school lobby because of the fact that he was beaten to death by some members of his own racial group in such a backlash. Noting that the photo of James Reeb would be controversial, Manuel, a Hispanic male, said, “I think this one [P12], 'cause the White people attacked their own White people. That's why I said this one.” It was ironic that while none of the White students in the present study expressed feelings of discomfort with the photo of James Reeb, and many of them wanted to include this photo in their final set, the students of color were concerned about their White peers’ discomfort with it, which maybe they thought would be caused by a sort of White guilt.

One more thing worth noting in the discussion of the Black students above is the last four lines, where Raven and Jasmine put emphasis on “some.” Following Nia’s comment—“it shows how Whites were willing to die for our race too” —Raven said, “Some.” Then, Nia replied by saying, “Some.” But, again, Jasmine emphasized “some” one more time, blinking her eyes towards Nia. This time, Nia tried to affirm Jasmine’s comment by repeating “some” as well as showing her palms towards Jasmine. The atmosphere of this conversation was not too serious; it was a bit playful. However, based on my observation of their exchanging eye contact, I could sense that these Black students had a shared concern that the photo of James Reeb might mislead the audience, diluting Whites’ racism against Blacks.

Analysis of other parts of the interview with this Black group provided information that helped make sense of this subtle tension. Based on the discussion above and other parts of the interview, it seemed apparent that not only Nia but also Raven and Jasmine felt a sort of ethical responsibility to remember the sacrifice of a White person for their own race. In other parts of the interview, Jasmine complained about the public ignorance of James Reed by contrasting it with the extraordinary popularity of Rosa Parks; Raven agreed with Jordan, when he expressed his gladness at knowing about the presence of some White supporters such as James Reeb. Also, these Black students admitted that MLK fought not just for the Black community. However, it also seemed apparent that their primary concern regarding MLK Day was the Black freedom struggle. This Black group’s explanation about their initial set of six images most closely resembled the grand narrative of freedom and progress with a focus on the Black freedom struggle. In addition, this Black group most explicitly stressed the importance of presenting the images of racial violence committed to African Americans during the Civil Rights era. In other words, to this group of Black students, White supporters were not the main focus in the story of

the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, the subtle tension observed in the conversation between Rave, Nia, Jasmine was seen as reflective of their concern over a reversal of the order of host and guest.

Furthermore, Jordan, another member of this Black group, seemed to live in this tension. In the present study, students across racial and ethnic groups included the photo of James Reeb in their choices. However, it was neither a Black nor a White student who felt a personal connection to this White man who sacrificed himself for Blacks. Interestingly, it was Jordan, a male student who self-identified as half White. Jordan expressed his gladness at knowing about James Reeb by saying, “Yeah, because I’m half White. That’s just, you don’t really hear about White people fighting, and so I’m glad to hear that.” In a follow-up interview with Jordan, he clearly confirmed that his biracial identity directly related to the personal connection he felt to James Reeb. He also mentioned that throughout his school experience, he had learned about conflict between Blacks and Whites all the time, which made little sense to him because his father was Black, but his mother was White. That being so, Jordan apparently believed it was important to present James Reeb (he selected the photo of James Reeb as one of the photos deserving more attention on MLK Day). Nonetheless, Jordan reserved his comment on James Reeb until I asked his group members if there were any photographs that they felt any personal connection to. Even when I directly asked Jordan, “Do you have any image you would like to add?” he did not mention the James Reeb photo; instead, he said, “No, the choices I picked the most were I believe fifteen, and do we have nine on there? Yeah, those were the ones I wanted the most on there.” Jordan’s reservation might reflect the tension he had to deal with every day while living in the Black community as a half-White person.

Meanwhile, the other Black group's discussion did not display the tension around presenting White supporters as much as Jordan's group did. Instead, this Black group's discussion provided a more nuanced understanding of why they wanted to include White supporters in their MLK Day exhibition. In the conversation below, the Black students talk about the photo of James Reeb:

Aliyah: Definitely that picture. Add 12.

Shanice: Oh yes. I feel like even though he died, his role in the whole thing was to open the door for other people to join the protest.

Tiara: And it wasn't just a Black thing, there were White people involved in the process, there were Jewish people involved in the process. There were all kinds of people involved in the process. Not solely, just the Black population. Yes, that's the population we were trying to achieve the goal for, but this guy literally got beat to death because of what he believed in which was the equality of the Black community.

Shanice: I feel like it always takes one person. And he was the one person who was the example of fighting for other people to let them know they're part of it too. And people will hate him too [unintelligible].

Tiara: I feel like putting that picture up, like all of a sudden, what's this White dude doing in here and then I read it and I was, okay. If I was White and I was walking by, I'd be like, what's this, okay. This was not only one person's thing. This was everyone's thing. And I feel like whenever we get to that day, they're like that's your day.

It's not, it's let's all be together. You're basically doing what he did not want on his day, going that's you all day. That's what I feel when I get there.

In the discussion above, Shanice described the meaning of James Reeb's sacrifice by paying attention to his role as a door opener of the Civil Rights movement to other, probably White, people. Shanice further described James Reeb as a sort of exemplary White person who took a risk to fight for others. Agreeing with Shanice, Tiara even expanded the range of people involved in the movement by mentioning Jewish people. Tiara's last comment further clarified her group's intention behind presenting all different kinds of participants, including Whites, in their MLK Day exhibition. Shanice and Tiara seemed to have an expectation for a sort of positive educational consequence that their exhibition would have on their White peers, providing them with a civic role model.

Yet, Shanice and Tiara were not naïve enough to think such photos would make a significant change among those who were susceptible to racist attitudes because of their social environment. These Black students were pessimistic about readers' responses when attempting to present their group's photos in the school lobby. Tiara said, "I just feel like a lot of these pictures are just a little bit, yeah. It'd be challenging to get that conversation going. Not all of us are as in tune with ourselves or the world or anything." When asked about who they want to see their group's exhibition, after saying "I'd say teenagers," Shanice explained, "It's hard if you are to show these pictures to old individuals, it's hard to change their mindset but if you teach it to younger kids, it's easier." Then she added, "Because if they're older, they're minds are already set."



In sum, the students in the present study frequently mentioned that, in their experience in schools, the Civil Rights movement was treated as a “Black vs. White thing.” However, they sought to tell a more inclusive story than that. Instead of being bounded by such a simplified story, students included the images featuring a variety of historical actors to the story of the freedom struggle in their final choices. In doing so, they hoped to correct misunderstandings that they thought arose from a simplistic version of the civil rights history. Table 9 describes misunderstandings that students pointed out and that they wanted to correct through their photo selections. More importantly, students in the present study provided different justifications for their inclusion of diverse populations depending on their race or ethnicity. Even within the same racial or ethnic group, there were variations, which could be explained, in part, by students’ socio-economic class or their previous knowledge and experience, or their sense of marginalization in the school. Lastly, but not least importantly, students’ discussion revealed the tension between telling a more inclusive story and keeping focused on the Black freedom struggle.

Table 9  
*Versions of Civil Rights Story Addressed by Students*

| Misunderstandings arising from the Black-White version             | Students’ ideas represented in their more inclusive version |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| MLK fought just for the Black community                            | MLK fought for everyone                                     |
| Only Blacks were discriminated against during the Civil Rights era | There were other people of color under oppression           |
| The Civil Rights movement was just a Black thing                   | Latinos/as were also a part of the Civil Rights movement    |
| All Whites were against Blacks                                     | There was another side to White people                      |

## Discussion

Although the students justified their choices in many different ways, none of them simply reproduced the simplistic story of the Civil Rights movement that they were used to hearing; instead, they had their own intention to include more diverse groups of people in their representations of the movement and of MLK. Students' intentions seemed sometimes altruistic, yet sometimes more self-oriented and even tactical. In this discussion section, I attempt to make sense of students' various intentions with the help of the previous studies and some useful theories.

According to previous studies, students of immigrant descent tend to emphasize the inclusion of people from different cultures in the narratives of historical events (Gryglewski, 2010; Savenige, 2016). This was true for the present study. Hispanic students and Asian students apparently preferred the photos representing more diversity. For instance, Manuel (a Hispanic) and Raquel (a Hispanic) wanted to show that MLK cared for Latinos/as; Shu (an Asian) and Indeela (an Asian) emphasized the existence of discrimination between different racial and ethnic groups during the Civil Rights era. Yet, they were not the ones who stressed the importance of making the story more inclusive. In fact, it was Whites who most strongly underscored the importance of displaying the presence of Latinos/as in the Civil Rights movement. How could this finding be explained?

Based on the comments of Claire and Katherine (White females), their inclusion of Latino/a marchers seemed to be intended to serve others, particularly young Latino/a students. Claire expressed her concern over her perception of the omission of Latinos/as from the civil rights curriculum by noting the importance of letting minority students know they were also part of the movement. Furthermore, White students' concern over the simplistic version of the Civil

Rights story seemed like an extension of their dissatisfaction about the narration of the nation's past lacking diversity, as Katherine's comment implies: "Yeah, honestly, we don't really talk about, like, I know, 'cause... We mainly talk about White people culture, so it kind of sucks."

Drawing on Gills's (1996) accounts of the interplay between memory and identity, I try to make sense of some students' attempts to add more diversity to the official narrative of the Civil Rights movement. According to Gills, identity and memory are interdependent, and both change over time; a community on the grand scale of a nation is no exception. I do not think students in the present study had a clear understanding of the interrelationship between national memory and identity. Yet, Gills' accounts led me to view students' reconstruction of the memory of the Civil Rights movement from their identity as young Americans living in a multicultural society. Gills notes that "memories help us make sense of the world we live in;" however, to several students, the preexisting memory did not seem entirely helpful because, while they interacted daily with diverse classmates, their learning of the past was limited to "Black and White things." Hence, for some students, the forgotten part of history that they encountered in the elicitation task might be more helpful for making sense of the world they were living in. Gills notes that "we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities" (p. 3). Is there any reason we should think only historians or political elites can reconstruct national memories? It seems more reasonable to me that students can also seek or create useable memories for themselves. In this sense, several students' pursuit of a more inclusive version of the Civil Rights story could be regarded as their attempt to revise national memories to suit their current identities as young Americans living in a multicultural society.

Gills' (1996) accounts of the interdependency of memory and identity were also useful to explain some students' attempts to diversify the story by putting emphasis on MLK's advocacy

for poor people. As presented in the findings section of this chapter, many students' discussions regarding diversity in the Civil Rights movement stressed racial or ethnic discrimination rather than poverty. Only two students (one was Katherine, a White female, and one was Raquel, a Hispanic female) explained their selections by noting the importance of talking about how working conditions, low wages, and poverty were protested; interestingly, these two students identified their socio-economic class as either working class or situational poverty. For Katherine and Raquel, it may have seemed unrealistic that the story of freedom struggle silenced any discussion of the issue of poverty because from their view, many Americans, including them, were struggling economically. Therefore, Katherine and Raquel's inclusion of images related to poor people in their final choices could be understood as their attempt to reconstruct the memory of the Civil Rights era to suit their realistic view of the world, which was largely shaped by their socio-economic identity.

Jordan's inclusion of White supporters in his individual choices could be understood in a similar vein. To Jordan, the simplistic narration of the Civil Rights movement, which tended to portray Blacks as victims and Whites as perpetrators, made little sense because his father was Black, but his mother was White. Although Jordan reserved his comment on the inclusion of James Reeb in the group discussion even when I directly asked him if there was any photo he wanted to add, his desire for a more inclusive story of the Civil Rights movement was certainly related to his biracial identity. Furthermore, for Jordan, a more inclusive version of Civil Rights story could be viewed as more fitting to the current identity of Americans who are living in a multicultural society with a growing number of biracial people.

Whether defined by nationality, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and/or race, students' identities seemed to play an important role in constructing their memory of MLK and of the Civil

Rights movement. However, Gills' (1996) theory alone does not fully explain the findings presented in this chapter. Sometimes, students' inclusion of a variety of people in their choices seemed driven by their sense of ethical responsibility. Not only Whites, but also several students of color (e.g., Sofia, a Hispanic female, and Jasmine, a Black female) felt sorry for the sacrifice of James Reeb and further felt obligated to remember him (I will revisit this theme of moral responses in Chapter 5). According to Barton and Levstik (2004), "[h]istory often calls upon strong moral responses" and "remembrance" is one basic form of moral response (p. 92). In addition to remembrance, some students in the present study seemed to feel a sort of ethical responsibility to tell others a more accurate and truthful story of the Civil Rights era. After pointing out the misunderstandings—for example, "all Whites were against Blacks" or "MLK fought only for the Black community"—that they believed arose from the simplistic version of the story, many students, regardless of race or ethnicity, wanted to correct such misunderstandings by including diverse groups of people in their choices. Some of them did so without further explaining their reasons, as if they firmly believed it would be self-evidently fair or ethical to correct stereotypes or misconceptions that people might have.

As such, students' inclusive versions of the Civil Rights story seemed like the result of their response to moral commands, for example, "Tell a more accurate and truthful story," "Don't exclude someone from the whole story because she/he is peripheral," "Remember innocent people's sacrifices," or "Be grateful for someone's sacrifice for you or your race." However, even if such moral voices sounded "*simultaneously* authoritative and internally persuasive" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342, italicized in original) to the students, they should be considered as only some of many voices that students were dialoging with during the interview.

According to Bakhtin (1981, p. 342), the unity of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses is rarely a given; rather,

it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code.

Bakhtin further suggests, “[t]he struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (p. 342). Drawing on this suggestion of Bakhtin's, students could be viewed as in the process of ideological becoming, developing their ideas about the world through constant dialogue with other, often conflicting, ideological discourses.

Following Bakhtin (1981), by seeing students as in the process of ideological becoming and considering students' utterances as citation, I was able to better understand the variations within the same racial, ethnic or socio-economic groups in terms of the extent of the inclusiveness in students' choices. According to Bakhtin (1981), we all borrow someone else's ideas and phrases; the word is half ours. From Bakhtin's view, utterances reflect discourses circulated in a community of language to which the speaker belongs. In the present study, both Katherine (a White female) and Raquel (a Hispanic female) who emphasized MLK's advocacy for poor people came from low-income family backgrounds; however, not all economically underprivileged students had the same reaction. In particular, Jasmine, the only Black student

who identified her social class as “situational poverty,” did not choose the photographs showing MLK’s support for poor people. One might interpret Jasmine’s exclusion of poor people based on her race, for example, by saying she did so strategically because racial justice was a more pressing issue to her group than poverty and she did not want to distract public interest from that issue. However, based on Jasmine’s later comments, her decision could instead be interpreted as reflecting her assimilation to the larger social discourse on poverty. In responding to my question of what MLK would like to say to our generation if he was still alive, Jasmine made the following unexpected comment:

I think he'll talk to the young, well the boys too, because you can't make a baby alone, but everybody's getting pregnant, and he wants us to think about the future and our jobs, not get pregnant. That's what I think about.

At first glance, “not get pregnant” might sound a bit out of context. Yet, her following elaborations made this message more understandable. She added, “Why get pregnant? You're still in school” and then commented,

Yeah, and he wanted his daughters to have a good life and have a good career, and you can't do that if you're not focused. You can't really go to school if you have a child. You've got to take care of it.

Jasmine thought it was so important for young students to avoid pregnancy because once getting pregnant, they wouldn’t be able to graduate and accordingly, they would have neither a good career nor a good life. From Bakhtin’s perspective on speech acts, Jasmine was actually citing someone else’s words when she said, “Why get pregnant? You're still in school.” According to Tobin (2000), “We can attempt to trace the sources that are being cited—and, in some cases,

mimicked or caricatured—by the students in the scripts” (p. 22). Although I cannot know exactly where the words Jasmine cited came from, I can at least assume that such words belonged to the larger society because her way of talking about early pregnancy, education, and jobs strikingly mirror the firm belief in meritocracy that many Americans hold as well as the mainstream discourse that attributes poverty to individual responsibility (Jones & Vagle, 2013). In this sense, Jasmine might be reluctant to expand the range of people whom MLK supported to include poor people, not just because of her race but also because of her community’s discourse on poverty.

In a similar way, Bakhtin’s perspective was helpful to understand why the reaction of Sofia (an upper-middle-class Hispanic female) to the photograph showing MLK’s support for Latino farmers’ rights was different from that of Manuel (a Hispanic male from the working class). Both Sofia and Manuel stressed that all different racial and ethnic groups including Latinos/as came together to support MLK. However, unlike Manuel, Sofia was hesitant to single out Latinos/as as a group of people for whom MLK advocated. One might think Sofia felt little connection specifically to Latino farmers because of her identity as upper middle class. Yet, drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of ideological becoming, Sofia’s hesitance could be understood as reflecting her evolving ideas on the Black freedom struggle. In the present study, Sofia was the only student who had seen the photo of Bloody Sunday on or around MLK Day. According to her, she saw the image during a community service project honoring MLK Day in which she participated with her church members. Sofia explained the purpose of displaying such a photo in this local event by commenting “[b]ecause we try to bring awareness to how it was back then. And I see that image to show like how the police treated all the Black people and stuff.” Based on her comments, I assume that she was probably developing her ideas about MLK’s vision and



the Black freedom struggle by dialoguing with other discourses that she had heard in her local community, although I cannot know exactly what ideological discourse circulated there.

So far, drawing on Bakhtin's ideas, I have attempted to explain within-group differences in students' perceptions of MLK as everybody's advocate by closely examining their utterances. My intention was to avoid arguing for a sort of identity determinism on students' ideas. Although I tried to stick to the data, I should admit that my speculation about the potential influences on students' utterances could be mistaken. The best we can do is to try to pay attention to the particular contexts the students inhabited and the ways they tried to make sense of them. However, until we ask the students more pointed follow-up questions about their utterances, we won't be sure what they meant by a given utterance or where such ideas came from. This is certainly a limitation of my study, and it would be a meaningful issue to address in a follow-up study.

Lastly, there is still an unresolved issue. Neither Gills' account of identity and memory nor Bakhtin's dialogism seemed to explain fully the Black students' inclusion of diverse historical actors in their choices. Particularly, the intention of Shanice's group to present a more inclusive version of the Civil Rights story in the school lobby seemed neither solely altruistic nor self-serving. While stressing MLK's advocacy for all people's equality, Shanice compared the public misunderstanding of MLK as a Black person's advocate to the misunderstanding that she thought contemporary people had about the Black Lives Matter movement. Tiara also exhibited her concern over the lack of understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement among the public while acknowledging the presence of extremists in the movement. Both Shanice and Tiara wished their potential audience would come to better understand the agenda of the Black Lives Matter movement by getting to know that MLK was not merely a Black advocate. When

explaining their choice of the photos showing White supporters, Shanice and Tiara exhibited their expectation that the photos would have a positive influence on their White peers.

How can we make sense of these Black students' unique intentions? At first glance, they seemed to bring their present-day concerns and commitment to the work of interpreting and representing the past. Yet, their inclusion of various historical actors in the Civil Rights story won't be clearly understood until we consider the local context in which they were intended to present their chosen images, and more importantly, their perception of that context. Tiara and other Black students in her group shared their negative perceptions of their school culture:

Tiara: Especially when I first moved here, it was such a big change for me. Because I had Aliyah in my class, but I came from, there was a lot of Black people, to Aliyah in my class. And this was, if we want to put his up in Sugar Hill [her previous school], this would not be a problem. But here I always feel reserved in what I say because I am Black [unintelligible]

Aliyah: Because I don't wanna, they'll take it as offensive or racist. Because you're doing too much.

Marquis: Why are you trying to cause issues?

Shanice: Yeah. Some people do say racist things but don't realize it just because I feel like I have the upper hand. And then there are people that support what they have to say. So, I feel like sometimes they don't think what they say is racist.

In the discussion above, these Black students shared their feelings of being reserved, monitored and discriminated against in the school. Based on Shanice's last comment, these Black students

seemed to think that not they but others, maybe their White peers who made up the biggest portion of the student body, had control the social order of this school.

Such Black students' feelings about their school experiences as a racial minority reminded me of Michel de Certeau's (1984) idea of tactics of the weak. De Certeau pays attention to the "tactics" that those who are seemingly powerless use in their everyday practices against the established social order or norms (p. 34). According to de Certeau (1984, p. 37), tactics are distinguished from strategies of employing power in that

[t]he space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision," as von Bulow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37)

As de Certeau describes above, those who employ tactics are not in the position to officially control the social order. Nonetheless, they still can control their lives by using a tactic, what de Certeau calls "an art of the weak" (p. 34); just like factory workers often work for themselves, not for their employer. In Oh's (2013) study, even young children who were linguistic and cultural minorities in their school turned the order of the classroom to their own ends by using creative tactics.

Influenced by de Certeau (1981) and Oh (2013), I view students who are positioned as minorities in a particular context in terms of various labels—such as race, ethnicity, ability,

language, socio-economic class, etc.—as “the weak.” Yet, as de Certeau suggests, the weak are not powerless; rather the weak can tactically change the established social norms and order or the predefined purpose of everyday practices. From the perspective of de Certeau, the Black students’ choices could be viewed as tactics of the weak because the students were working with the photo elicitation task not for me or anyone else, but for themselves. More importantly, the Black students’ exhibition apparently targeted their peers; thus, they had a clear expectation for such an exhibition to change the pervasive norms in the local context, which they perceived as unfavorable to them. In other words, the Black students’ choices might be their tactic to recruit more allies in others’ territory.

Taken together, the discussion about the findings of this chapter enriches educators’ understanding of students’ desire for a more inclusive story of the Civil Rights era. It also helps educators develop a more sophisticated understanding of the significant yet limited role of students’ identities in shaping their ideas on the past by examining variations within the same racial or ethnic groups. In addition, this discussion section expands the previous studies on students’ historical understanding that have tended to focus on racial differences by considering the intersections of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic class. Lastly, this section encourages educators to see students’ ideas as evolving in a particular context rather than remaining static, and even to consider the possibility that the historical representations chosen by marginalized groups of students could be their tactic to change the established social norms or order.

## CHAPTER 5

### EMBRACING THE DARK SIDE

*Nia (a Black female): Yeah, because I have a little sister, and the only thing she knows is that he gave a speech, and nothing else about the sit-ins, the beating that they had to go through. The bombings of the schools. I meant, the churches.*

This chapter focuses on students' efforts to provide a more balanced depiction of the Civil Rights movement by including descriptions of struggle and violence. Although students in the present study acknowledged the importance of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech and his other contributions, such as racial reconciliation, they wanted young students to know more than that, as the quote by Nia shows above. Students from different racial and ethnic groups wanted to highlight not only the glorious aspects of the Civil Rights era but also its dark side, for example, the hardships that MLK himself, African Americans as a group, and other supporters had to undergo to achieve civil rights; yet, the emphasis on creating a balance between the bright side and the dark side was most explicitly pronounced among Black students.

The first part of this chapter discusses how the images students chose to show accomplishment and unity are consistent with those that Black students said schools usually showed them in civil rights lessons. I also highlight the positive emotions that accompanied these images—feelings of pride and of appreciation. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on students' moral responses to the images of struggle and violence and their attempts to embrace such images. I then describe some interesting aspects of Black students' rationale for including the dark side of the Civil Rights era: their emphasis on the struggle as a necessary process for

democratic social change. In the discussion section, I attempt to make sense of Black students' unique civic voices heard in this chapter as well as their complicated emotions towards the images of historical injustice based on previous studies (e.g., Epstein, 2010; Levy, 2017). I also try to explain students' various reactions to the visual texts showing both the bright and dark sides of the Civil Rights era by drawing on some useful concepts such as Werner's (2002) *reflexive readings* and Zerubavel's (1996) *sociobiographical memory*.

## **Findings**

### **The Bright Side: Accomplishments and Unity**

Students' comments on the positive side of the Civil Rights era fell into two categories; one was more focused on the accomplishments made by MLK while the other one tended to spotlight harmonious moments during the Civil Rights movement. While presenting the findings regarding those two themes of the bright side in turn, I also pay attention to some delicately nuanced differences among the Black students' explanations.

#### *Accomplishments*

Almost every group placed the "I Have a Dream" photo among their six images, and they did so automatically, without debate. They seemed to consider this photo as the best representation of MLK's accomplishments as well as one of the most important moments in U.S. history. For instance, Shu, an Asian student, said,

For these three, that one's the most significant one [P5]. That's his speech, "I Have a Dream" speech, and that right there is the Washington Monument, and over there is just Washington, D.C., the White House. That shows how I feel on the matter; then it shows how mainly the subject is because America is created on the

foundation of equality and freedom. But yeah, he had to go up there and then to talk about how everybody is equal.

Shu pointed out the importance of the “I Have a Dream” speech in the progress of democracy in U.S. history. She believed MLK contributed to realizing American civic ideals by reconfirming the notion that “everybody is equal” in the capital of this country.

Students chose the photo of Lyndon Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act and the photo of MLK featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* far less often, but they also credited these photos with contributing to progress, particularly in the Civil Rights movement or democracy in general. For example, Sofia, a Hispanic female, said:

... this one of him on *Time Magazine*, it shows that that was posted after they affirmed that [segregated] public bus systems are unconstitutional, and I think that one's important because it's like a big milestone for the Civil Rights movement, and like, it really started bringing up more awareness, 'cause it was the *Time Magazine*, so it wasn't just (( in )) like the Birmingham, Alabama, Rosa Parks was, it's now all over, and more people can see it.

Sofia justified her choice by noting the importance of the growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement beyond the South. Isabel, a student in the other Hispanic group, made similar comments when asked which photos she would have liked to add if she had been allowed to do so:

This one [P3] because it really shows how his influence became, it expanded into the whole country, and how his ideals really began to grow into people and into the media and things like that, which was important for progress.

To several groups, while the photo from *Time Magazine* signified a major milestone later in the movement, the photo of Lyndon Johnson seemed to symbolize the lasting fruit of the movement. Molly, a White female, commented:

Then I feel like this one [P14] would probably be first because it's showing his overall accomplishment ... achievement. So this one would probably be first, like the most important. And then probably the magazine [P3] would be second, because that's another big way to get the word out everywhere.

Indeela, an Asian female, further elaborated on the importance of Lyndon Johnson's signing the Civil Rights Act by saying, "We chose [P14] because it represents that he actually was able to accomplish getting his goal and was able to make some more steps towards making everyone equal."

Not surprisingly, the Black students also highly regarded the accomplishments that MLK made, and they apparently felt proud of such accomplishments. Yet, the Black students were slightly different from other groups in that they considered it important to know not only major but also minor accomplishments. For instance, Nia, a Black female, said, "Yeah, they [teachers] just focus on "I Have a Dream" speech, and not the individual achieve, like the little small achievements that he has accomplished as well." Agreeing with Nia, Jasmine, a Black female added, "Yeah, like about going around talking to the family door to door. I didn't know he did that." Ebony, another Black female in the other Black group, also noted the importance of knowing the details about MLK's work, commenting:

I feel like in terms of school they teach us the highlighted version. What he actually did instead of going in depth of him as a person and the little minor thing, no matter how minor, that builds up into what he accomplished in the future. So, I



don't feel like schools have really focused on how his work built up to what he had accomplished.

In the comment above, Ebony complained about her school experience of learning about MLK for its lack of depth and breadth more explicitly than Jasmine. Yet, based on their comments, these Black students seemed to have a shared belief in the importance of kids' learning about the notable outcomes of MLK's work as well as about his whole life, including smaller achievements.

Taken together, students' explanations suggest that they considered MLK Day as a day to celebrate the accomplishments of MLK himself or of the nation as a whole. Many students narrated MLK's individual achievements in relation to national progress. Indeed, MLK became a symbol of national heritage among students, representing national progress in racial relations. Not only Black students, but also students of other races or ethnicities came to have some sense of identification with his accomplishments, as a White student's remark implies: "They [the photos] made me feel proud of what we've accomplished so far." Meanwhile, it was students of color who expressed their deepest appreciation of what MLK had accomplished. Hoping for teenagers to see her group's chosen photos, an Asian student said, "They [teenagers] have to understand what this man had done for us, and they shouldn't have taken him for granted because lots of people, they still don't even remember him or they don't even realize..." Overall, the images students chose to represent MLK's accomplishments were accompanied by positive emotional reactions.

## Unity

Unity was one of the most consistently mentioned themes in students' responses. Many groups of students chose the photo of marchers holding hands to represent this theme, as an extract from the interview with Black students shows below:

Jasmine: What seven [P7] shows them, like they came together as one.

Raven: Yeah. They all came together in unity, all the different races. It didn't matter if you were Black, White, Latino, they all came together to stand up for the rights, the civil rights.

Raven explicitly emphasized the importance of displaying unity among different races. Although Molly, a White female, did not explicitly mention the word *unity*, she also wanted to show a harmonious scene of supporters. After mentioning the similarity between the photo of marchers holding hands and the photo of the Selma march, she said, "Yeah, either one. I guess maybe we can do this one [P7] because it shows them holding hands and being together for it." Like Molly, several groups preferred the photo of marchers holding hands because of the postures of the marchers featured in the photo.

A group of Hispanic students also noted the theme of unity in explaining their choice of the photo of marchers holding hands. While their rationale for choosing this image was not unique, their emotional reaction to it was worth noting. The Hispanic students' discussion proceeded as follows:

Raquel: I like the one where they're holding hands [P7].

Camilla: The unity?

Isabel: Yes, I like that, too. They showed us that picture in school.

Raquel: Because I think it shows because he's not in the picture, but it shows what it meant to so many people and so many races.

Camilla: Yes, that's true. I like it, too.

Antonio: Yes, I really appreciate that one.

Camilla and Isabel liked the image of unity; Antonio seemed to like it even more. Based on Raquel's comments and on Camilla and Antonio's agreement with Raquel, the positive emotions these students experienced when considering this image seemed particularly related to their identity as an ethnic minority.

Shanice, a student in the other Black group, also wanted to display an image showing unity, but she focused more on MLK's perspective. Pointing to the photo of marchers joining hands, she commented, "I chose that one because I feel like that's showing Martin Luther King's goal being achieved and showing how he wanted unity." Agreeing with Shanice, her group members added these comments:

Tiara: I think it's more powerful than you're giving it.

Aliyah: Because I feel like with that, in school there was more of it said, in the end they all came together. But you really don't see the visual aspect of that.

Marquis: I feel like a lot of people, they confuse Martin Luther King's vision of having not just Black people, but Black and White and just everybody together. Because sometimes people confuse it with Malcolm X where it was more of just a Black people movement. And this right here is more like, it shows more his view.

Tiara: Yeah, he wasn't like a Black Panther like Malcolm X.

Marquis:        Yeah.

These Black students emphasized that MLK's vision was racial reconciliation and distinguished MLK from Malcom X. This group seemed to choose the photo of unity not only because it represented MLK's vision but also because they themselves were aligned with his vision. In the later part of the interview, Tiara, a Black female, further lamented today's Black Lives Matter movement for its lack of unity. Acknowledging the presence of some extremists, Tiara and other Black students wished the Black Lives Matter movement had been less exclusive and more understood.

However, Tiara's group was not the only group that expressed concerns about being young Americans living in a divided society. Regardless of their race or ethnicity, many students were concerned about the current division among young people. Several White and Asian students paid attention to the striking contrast between the unity in the Civil Rights movement and the division among people around equality issues in the present society. For instance, in responding to my question of what MLK would say to our generation in the U.S. if he were still alive today, Colby, a White male, commented:

Martin Luther King was about bringing both parties together, bringing everyone together. Now without him, everyone is out for getting their movement up themselves. Just for themselves and just for their movement. And there's no unity.

Martin Luther King fought for the unity between all races.

In this comment, Colby clearly pointed out the lack of unity in today's protests, which he contrasted with MLK's vision.

Meanwhile, another group of White students talked specifically about the division between the Black Lives Matter movement and the All Lives Matter movement. These White students didn't seem to interpret the Black Lives Matter movement in the same way: Dylan was not sure which side MLK would be on regarding the Black Lives Matter movement; Claire perceived the movement as, in part, the cause of the divide in modern American society; Katherine considered the movement to be misunderstood by many people. Nonetheless, they seemed to have a shared concern over the division among people, which they believed MLK would try to bridge if he were still alive.

This finding implies that students bring their present-day concerns and desires to the work of interpreting the past, and their common emphasis on “unity” in their portrayal of the Civil Rights movement might reflect their shared identity as young Americans living in a divided society. To them, the fact that people from different races or ethnic groups came together to fight for equality in the past was not only significant historical knowledge, but it was also what they really longed for and found hard to imagine in the present day.

In summary, students almost unanimously included positive images—glorious and harmonious moments of the Civil Rights movement—in their choices. Their explanations demonstrated their clear understanding of the significance of those images in U.S. history and mirrored the depiction of the Civil Rights movement in the grand narrative of history. While some students explained the images of accomplishment and unity in more neutral tones, others engaged in such explanations on a more personal level, identifying with the nation's past and feeling proud of it or appreciating MLK and the united marchers who fought for civil rights. In addition, some Black and White students highlighted MLK's pursuit of unity by contrasting the unity in the Civil Rights movement to the division in today's protests.

## **The Dark Side: Struggle and Violence**

The bright side of civil rights history—“accomplishments” and “unity”—was highlighted in most groups’ final set of images. However, many of the students wished others could see the uglier aspects of the Civil Rights era, too—but for distinctive reasons between Black students and other students. In what follows, I first present some White, Hispanic, and Asian students’ rationales for showing the struggle to achieve civil rights and then examine Black students’ justifications for their choices.

### *Empathy for those who suffered*

Several groups included images of struggle in their final choices. In a Hispanic group’s discussion, it was apparent that in order to represent the struggles of innocent people, they chose the photo of James Reeb, who was beaten to death during the Selma march, and the “rock-hitting” photo, in which MLK was hit by a rock. In responding to my question about what her audience would learn from her group’s exhibit, Sofia said, “... I feel like, these images show, like, that they actually like, suffered, and really struggled through, and I want people to like, open up their eyes, and focus more on how tough it was back then.” Sofia and Manuel, her partner, further expressed their empathetic attitudes towards the people featured in the images of struggle in the latter part of the interview:

Interviewer: And, how do these images make you feel?

Sofia: They make me feel, like, sad.

Interviewer: Sad?

Sofia: 'Cause I just feel bad that they had to go through those, like, harsh things, and like, how cruel people were back then.

Manuel: Yeah, such a person with such influential power, and another such person that is trying to help—how they ended up, that makes me sad.

Sofia: Like, these were innocent, good people, you know; they just wanted to live their lives—

Manuel: —and help everybody—

Sofia: —instead of being you know, segregated, and you know, being ((named)) by color, and it's sad that their lives had to end short, just because of hate.

Not only Sofia and Manuel but also many other students expressed their feelings of sadness at the images of suffering, and they seemed to feel a sense of responsibility to let others know about these tragic events that happened in the past. For instance, Jenna, a White female, who considered the photo of Bloody Sunday as showing “the reality of the issue,” further emphasized its value by saying, “I feel like this one [P11] is very important to represent the hurt that was felt by the hatred. It just brings the person that's looking at the photo closer to the problem.” Like Sofia and Jenna, several students expected that others would feel empathy for those who were victims of hatred and violence.



*Figure 6.* The photo of Bloody Sunday. This photo captures John Lewis (foreground) and marchers beaten by state troopers in Selma, Alabama. In an event that would come to be known as “Bloody Sunday,” voting rights marchers were severely beaten as they attempted to march to Montgomery for voting rights, on March 7, 1965. AP Photo. Image downloaded from <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/03/07/this-day-in-politics-march-7-1965-437394> in September 2018.

### *Struggle and violence as a process of progress*

Not surprisingly, Black students emphasized the inclusion of images showing struggles and violence. However, their rationale for choosing such images and their emotional reactions to them were quite distinct from those of other racial or ethnic groups.

Instead of simply sympathizing with the victims of violence, Black students emphasized the significance of the struggle as a necessary process for democratic social change, focusing more on the civic agency and sacrifice of African Americans. Although several other groups also chose both the bright side and the dark side, the Black students were unequivocal in their emphasis on the importance of balancing between these two contrasting aspects of the Civil Rights era. They hoped that everybody would know in detail not only the result but also the process of getting there, although that process was not as pleasant as the outcome. Jordan, for



instance, said, “I feel like a lot of the stuff on Martin Luther King Day is about unity, about unity, but I feel like the hardships are important too.” In a later part of the interview, Jordan further elaborated on the importance of presenting hardships. Pointing to the photo of MLK being struck by a rock, Jordan said,

I feel like people think that getting shot and going to jail were the only things that Martin Luther King himself had to go through, but it shows that he faced violence every single time he went out on the streets. He had to overcome that in order to reach his goals

In the comment above, Jordan highlighted the everyday-ness of MLK’s struggle by contrasting it with two widely known hardships of MLK’s life. Following this comment, Jordan also stressed the significance of knowing the collective struggles of African Americans as he justified his selection of the photo of Bloody Sunday.

In emphasizing the importance of displaying images of hardships, Black students in both groups commonly critiqued schools for not showing such images in classrooms. They complained that teachers only vaguely mentioned violent episodes such as Bloody Sunday, even during Black History Month. According to them, schools usually showed only “good stuff” or “happy stuff,” on their own terms. Black students thought they would face challenges when attempting to display some of their chosen images because schools would not want them to show the violent reaction to the Civil Rights movement. Raven specifically identified the photo of Bloody Sunday and the photo of MLK getting hit with a rock as examples of violent images. Then, Nia, Raven, and Jasmine elaborated:

Nia: Yeah, they don't want, because most of my life, we've always seen this, like my parents who showed me this side [P11] of what happened.

Raven: Yeah, when you do your extra research, and you actually look more into it, that's when you start to see these [P 11 & P15] But when you're at school, you usually just see the good parts (pointing to the left column of their six images, see Figure 7).

Jasmine: The good stuff.

According to these Black students, they came to see the more violent side through personal research or their parents, claiming that schools did not show that side to them. However, not all Black students had access to such alternative sources. Aliyah and Ebony in the other Black group had not even heard about Bloody Sunday before, and they were shocked when they encountered the photo of Bloody Sunday during the interview. For instance, Ebony said,

No. What? Bloody Sunday, why haven't I heard of that? Why isn't that, why don't they show that to us? That's a part of their struggle, everyone's struggle, for achieving voting rights, and I feel like that should've been, that was a part of achieving civil rights.



*Figure 7* Raven and Nia are pointing to “bad stuff” at the same time.

This Black group further tried to speculate on why teachers had not shown them the image of Bloody Sunday; however, after the discussion, they became incensed against what they understood to be censorship on the part of schools because it was also an important part of the movement from their perspective. Aliyah, Ebony and Tiara further discussed this issue as follows:

Aliyah: I feel like it would be hard, many teachers are like the curriculum, if we show this picture in classrooms, I feel like they think it's too emotional; it's too extreme. So that's why they really don't show it. And that's a highlight, a big one during his fight.

Ebony: Yeah, I feel like most of it was extreme because people were getting beat. That was a part of the movement.

Tiara: Yeah, you can't censor.

Ebony: You can't censor what was 100%. I don't understand.

Aliyah: It was an everyday thing.

Ebony: It really was.

Tiara: I feel like a lot of the pictures that we get to see are either the end, or this is what happens in the end, but we never get to see the progression, the process, because it was gross, it was nasty, it was dirty, it was not fun. And you don't ever wanna show that because people get emotional.

Tiara's last comment above seemed like an almost perfect summary of the main points that Black students tried to make in explaining their choice of images representing struggle. It was Black students' common belief that the detailed process of progress should also be shown to students, although it might engender unhappy feelings among them.

The Black students' emphasis on the inclusion of such unpleasant details reflected their concern about the potentially harmful consequences arising from a falsely positive description of the struggle for civil rights. Black students were concerned that the exclusive focus on only happy moments, such as MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech or the passage of the Civil Rights Act, would mislead young students to think that social change could be made overnight by a heroic figure. Tiara commented:

I would want, if you finish looking at this, to gather from this, is it was a progression of the struggle. It wasn't just like he woke up and decided he wanted civil rights and next year, sorry. What's the word. Boom, there it is, boom there's civil rights. Sorry I was trying to think of the word. But it didn't just happen overnight in an instant is what I was trying to say.

Jordan expanded Tiara's points by noting the significance of knowing the struggle of ordinary folks:

Yeah, I feel like they [students] need to know that, you know, the whole movement wasn't just one speech and it's done and [crosstalk] together, but they actually had to face a lot of trials and tribulations to get through it, and get up to that point and build up that traction

Throughout the interviews, Jordan and other Black students apparently appreciated MLK's achievements and his sacrifice; however, as the comments made by Jordan and Tiara imply, the Black students believed young students should know that democratic social change requires endurance and the sacrifices of numerous ordinary people. For this reason, Nia was concerned about her little sister's ignorance of the unpleasant yet necessary process to achieve civil rights while knowing only MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech. In a similar vein, the Black students commonly blamed their schools for perceived censoring of the unflattering events from the curriculum.

In addition, Black students had a quite different expectation when displaying the images of struggle and violence, compared to their counterparts. As previously mentioned, other racial or ethnic groups of students expected that a potential audience would express empathy for those who suffered. However, Black students did not simply intend to arouse empathy. Rather, they hoped a potential audience would become more appreciative of the rights that they have come to enjoy. For instance, Nia and Raven focused specifically on voting rights. Emphasizing the significance of showing the photo of Bloody Sunday, Nia said, "Since nowadays, they be talking like, young people, especially the Black community, haven't been voting, so this shows what people have gone through in order for y'all to vote." In a later discussion, Nia and Raven opined

that, if MLK were still alive, he would speak to the younger generation: “Come on guys, get ready to vote.” Although Nia understood young Black people who were not voting, she further emphasized the importance of voting in her comment: “Because they don't think their voice will be heard, say, this is what they believe too, but look what happened. They were able to vote.” Jordan also developed a particular lesson from the dark side of the Civil Rights era by saying, “I feel like if they actually knew about the bad stuff that they went through to get to the good stuff, then they'd appreciate Martin Luther King and his accomplishments more.”

In sum, Black students emphasized the importance of showing the struggles along with the accomplishments because progress came only at great cost. Furthermore, by choosing the images of struggle, Black students expected that their audience (particularly other Black students) would become more grateful to their predecessors for their sacrifices, and that they would not take for granted the rights that they had come to enjoy. Meanwhile, students of other races or ethnicities generally explained their choice of the images representing struggle and violence in terms of humanism. In both cases, students seemed to feel a sort of ethical responsibility to remember historical injustice, although Black students tended to take a more instrumental approach towards representing the dark side of the Civil Rights era.

### **Discussion**

According to previous studies, the images of suffering had not normally been used for MLK Day in U.S. culture (Wills, 2005) and the celebratory narrative had characterized the representation of MLK in U.S. textbooks (Aldridge, 2006). Despite such a monolithic narrative in the mainstream culture, many students in the present study attempted to include the dark side of the Civil Rights era in their MLK Day exhibition. Yet, there were some notable differences in students' justifications for such inclusion depending on race; while some Asian, Hispanic, and

White students mainly used moral terms (e.g. empathy), Black students used civic or political terms (e.g., democracy) more than moral terms. In this discussion section, I try to make sense of Black students' unique voices and their complicated emotions towards racial violence in the past. Then, I discuss how their identities and their lived experiences could explain the differing reactions of students (particularly students of color) to the visual texts featuring both the bright and the dark sides of the Civil Rights era.

In the present study, unlike their counterparts, Black students did not simply express sympathy towards the victims featured in the photographs of struggle. Instead, they expressed their concern about some potentially negative consequences of young students' ignorance of the dark side of the Civil Rights story; they also expressed their expectation of some positive educational consequences for their audience. Interestingly, their concerns and expectations were all related to the question of what youth civic or political engagement would look like in a near future. None of the Black students wanted a falsely positive and heroic narrative of the Civil Rights movement to mislead young students to believe the myth that social change can be made instantly by a single heroic figure and the process of such change is always happy. Nia and Raven were particularly concerned about the low voting rate of young Blacks, and they wanted their potential audience not to take for granted the civil rights that they came to enjoy at the expense of numerous people's lives. Indeed, these Black students' explanations sounded quite pedagogical in that they developed useful lessons from the violent past for the younger generation, particularly for young Blacks.

How, then, can we make sense of Black students' unique rationale for including the dark side of the Civil Rights era? Terrie Epstein's (2000; 2001; 2010) studies on Black and White students' historical understanding provide some insights. Epstein found racial differences in

students' ideas, although the grand narrative of freedom and progress was dominant in both groups. While White students described U.S. history as a gradual expansion of democratic rights for more people, Black students viewed it as a story of racial discrimination and their racial group's struggle for freedom. She found that Black students put their racial group's experiences at the center of historical narratives of the nation. This racial difference was also found in students' explanations of several historical events, for example, the Civil Rights movement. According to Epstein, unlike White students, who explained it using more general terms, Black students emphasized the movement's impact on their own racial group. Although Epstein's studies do not tell us how other ethnic groups made sense of U.S. history, her findings helped me understand why Black students in the present study uniquely constructed the meaning of the violent past in relation to their racial group's concerns and interests.

Levy's (2017) study on students' construction of heritage narratives further deepened my understanding of Black students' ideas regarding MLK and the Civil Rights movement. In her study, *heritage* is defined as "one mechanism by which a group of people can generate feelings of pride, connection, and belonging around a shared past, no matter how painful or violent that past may have been" (p. 159). In Levy's (2017) study with Hmong, Chinese, and Jewish students, she found that the strong emotional ties that the students had towards their own heritage history topics (e.g., the Vietnam War for the Hmong students) motivated and facilitated their investigation of such topics; furthermore, they engaged with those topics on a more personal level. In this vein, Black students would never think of MLK and the Civil Rights movement in the same way that other racial or ethnic groups of students would because it is part of the heritage of the Black community. Although MLK is a symbol of national heritage for many Americans, representing progress in racial relations, and although the Civil Rights movement is



one of the most important events in U.S. history, MLK and the movement have special significance for the Black community. When we see MLK and the Civil Rights movement as Black students' own heritage, we can begin to understand how they make meaning of the violent images and why the images evoke complicated emotions. Most students felt sad when they saw the images of suffering, and some students got upset and angry when they understood the racism that explained the origin of the movement and the counter-reaction. However, only Black students expressed a sense of relief or a sense of privilege upon seeing such images, as shown in Shanice's comment: "I guess in a sense privileged that we didn't have to go through, at least me, didn't have to go through that."

Jewish students' response to the Holocaust story in Levy's (2017) study was particularly helpful to me in understanding why Black students in the present study assigned a distinct meaning to the images of struggle and violence. Levy found that Jewish students expressed empathy towards Jewish victims, yet at the same time expressed their desire for a multidimensional depiction of Jews during the Holocaust. Deborah, in Levy's (2017) study, stated:

I thought it was interesting that they don't seem to get as much attention, even though they were resisting the Nazis. It tends, I don't know—a lot of the stuff you read about tends to focus on the concentration camps, rather than people who were fighting back, I guess. (pp. 178-179)

Regarding her comments, Levy (2017) explained that "[h]ere, Deborah implies that the mainstream focus on Jews as victims does not allow for stories in which Jews are empowered actors in their own lives" (p. 179). Although the experiences of the two different groups—Jewish and Black—cannot be mapped onto one another, Levy's analysis of Deborah's comments

offered me one possible explanation for Black students' unique response to the racial violence during the Civil Rights era. Based on Levy's interpretation, it makes a great deal of sense to me that Black students in the present study described violent scenes as examples of Black empowerment and resistance of oppression rather than just as victimization.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, MLK does not solely belong to the heritage of the Black community. He is also a part of the national heritage of the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that not only Black students, but also students of other races or ethnicities had pride in MLK's achievements—particularly the expansion of civil rights for more people. In the present study, some Black and some White students described their feelings about their final set of images for the MLK Day exhibition by using similar words: sad but hopeful, or respectful. In describing their emotions, students often used *we* to indicate themselves and other members of the national community, as shown in the following comment made by Jenna, a White female: "They made me feel proud of what we've accomplished so far. But also, make me remember the different things we have to focus on today."

All Asian and most Hispanic students also expressed positive emotions towards MLK's accomplishments. However, theirs were more than a sense of pride or of hope; rather, they seemed to feel appreciation. Like their Black counterparts, Asian and Hispanic students in the present study expressed their gratitude to MLK and thought it unfortunate that most teenagers seemed ignorant of his hard work or took it for granted. For instance, Indeela, an Asian female, said, "...they kind of forgot the whole Martin Luther King yet they only, all they would actually really know is that he had done the 'I Have a Dream' speech and they probably wouldn't even know what that was about either." She added, "I feel like teenagers, at most they have to understand what this man have done for us and they shouldn't have taken him for granted

because lots of people, they still don't even remember him..." Raquel, a Hispanic female, made a similar comment but with a more intense tone. After mentioning about her and her sister's love and respect for MLK, she went on to say,

But there are some people that, like Camilla says, the way that they grow up, they just kind of brush it off as like, "That happened in the past. We're learning about this again? Can't we just stop learning about this guy?" They just don't give it the importance it deserves because they just don't care about the kind of things that really matter or because they just have this internal, just internalized racism.

Raquel and her other group members, like Camila, strongly lamented some students belittling MLK's achievements that they thought deserved credit.

How, then, could we understand the reactions of Indeela, Raquel, and some other students of color to MLK's accomplishments? One may explain their expression of appreciation by noting their shared identities as ethnic minorities in the present society. These students might feel indebted to MLK for the freedom they have come to enjoy. Undoubtedly, Black students are the main beneficiaries of MLK's work; yet, these students of color could also be viewed as the sub-beneficiaries of it, as Indeela's comment implies: "They have to understand what this man have done for us." Indeela's use of *us* might implicitly show her identification with MLK's achievements, probably as an ethnic minority.

Zerubavel's (1996, p. 290) concept of *sociobiographical memory* further enhanced my understanding of the deep gratitude of the Hispanic and Asian students for MLK's achievements. According to Zerubavel, *sociobiographical memory* indicates a sort of "existential fusion of our own personal biography with the history of the groups or communities to which we belong" (p. 290). Such existential fusion accounts for "the sense of pride, pain, or shame we sometimes

experience with regard to events that had happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them” (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 290). The concept of *sociobiographical memory* definitely helps to understand the sense of pride that many students experienced with regard to the glorious events during the Civil Rights era; but it was particularly helpful for me to make sense of the reaction of students of color by directing me to these students’ comments on what their predecessors’ lives looked like as well as on what meaning MLK’s work had for people at that time. Pointing to the photo of Bloody Sunday, Camila, a Hispanic female, said,

I guess I on a personal level, I think we all can say the same thing. That since we’re Hispanics, Latinos, Latinas, even back then our people experienced unjust racism and stuff like that. We still experience some of the things like that but maybe not as physical abuse, but I think we still...verbally.

In the comments above, Camila showed her connection to and awareness of the continuing racial discrimination against her own ethnic group by using the phrases *our* and *we*. Agreeing with Camila, Antonio, Isabel and Raquel spent a great portion of the interview sharing endless examples of verbal discrimination that they or people close to them had experienced or that they had seen in the media. Then, Antonio described the meaning of MLK for Latinos who lived in the segregation era by saying, “He’s a ray of sunshine in a thunderstorm.” Manuel, a Hispanic male in the other Hispanic group, described the impact of MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech by commenting, “And for colored people, too. I mean, in that era, I don’t think it was just Black people, I think there was some Hispanics, I think they also got some shadow of light in that situation.” Based on these Hispanic students’ comments, it seemed clearer that students of color in the present study were grateful to MLK not only because of the indirect benefit that they came to enjoy from his work in the present day but also because of their ancestors’ debt to him. In

other words, the tremendous respect and gratitude that these students of color had for MLK's accomplishments could be viewed as the manifestation of *sociobiographical memory*.

Lastly, the findings of this chapter illustrate many students' efforts to provide a more truthful and balanced depiction of the Civil Rights era by including images of struggle and violence. However, students' concerns about the potential challenges of displaying violent images were also pronounced in their discussion. Black students in particular anticipated that the school would not want them to show students such violent images because of their affective impact. Then, what kinds of affective impact did the violent images of the Civil Rights movement have on students in the present study? If such affective impacts varied depending on students' race or ethnicity, how could their identities help explain such variations?

As Black students anticipated, the images of struggle and violence brought out strong emotional responses among the students. These emotions were mostly unhappy. Regardless of race and ethnicity, the students felt sad when they saw these images because of the suffering the innocent people in the photo had to endure. However, stronger emotional responses occurred not because of the violent images themselves, but because of the continuity between the past and the present that the students of color saw in the images, particularly the photo of Bloody Sunday depicting John Lewis and other African Americans being beaten by state troopers. Not surprisingly, a group of Black students expressed intense anger when the photo of Bloody Sunday reminded them of police brutality, which is part of their everyday lives; yet, it, as Ebony said, would be "another form of oppression, mentally because you're in fear and that power is stripped away from you. And it's subconsciously shifted away from you because you're living in fear." Like their Black counterparts, Asian students and some Hispanic students also got upset at the photo of Bloody Sunday because of their perception of ongoing racism. Yet, there were slight

differences between Asian and some Hispanic students while explaining their anger; unlike the Hispanic students, who shared mostly their own lived experiences of racism, the Asian students mentioned examples of discrimination experienced by other minority groups, for example, President Donald Trump's border control policies or police brutality towards Blacks. No matter whether they experienced such discrimination directly or indirectly, the photo of Bloody Sunday evoked strongly negative emotions among those students of color.

The intense anger that some students of color showed was apparently different from the sadness they felt because their anger was not merely evoked by the violent element of the photos. Rather, their intense reaction should be considered the evidence of their *reflexive readings* of the visual texts. According to Werner (2002), there are multiple ways of reading visual texts, and the different types of reading can be displayed on a continuum depending on the extent to which readers have authority in interpreting the meaning of the texts (see Table 10). Werner explains, “[m]oving along the continuum from the first to the third clusters, the readings become more inferential, and relationships between reader and text more open” (p. 408). Assigning *reflexive readings* to the extreme right of the continuum, Werner elaborates as follows:

Reading images is autobiographically grounded in our expectations, desires, and prior experience. Walker and Chapin (1997) note that because “people vary according to their gender, race, religion, age, class, nationality, politics, tastes, etc., the same [visual text] will often provoke different reactions” (p. 75).  
(Werner, 2002, p. 419)

Based on Werner's explanation, when readers perform reflexive readings of visual texts, they draw on their autobiographical information to make sense of the meaning of the texts. In this vein, the strong emotional reaction of some students of color to the photo of Bloody Sunday

could be viewed as reflecting their prior experience, expectations, or desires, largely marked by their identity, in this case, race and ethnicity.

Table 10  
*Different Types of Reading of Visual Texts*

|                       | Closed               | Open                                                                                                |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purposes of readings: | 1. manifest meanings | 2. associative meanings<br>3. evaluative meanings                                                   |
| Examples of readings: | (1) instrumental     | (2) narrative<br>(3) iconic<br>(4) editorial<br>(5) indicative<br>(6) oppositional<br>(7) reflexive |

\*This table was directly adopted from “Reading visual texts,” by Werner, 2002, *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 30(3), p. 408. Copyright [2002] by College and University Faculty Assembly of National Council for the Social Studies

Although Werner’s (2002) concept of *reflexive readings* helped me explain the interplay between some students’ reactions and their identity or prior experience in their reading of the violent images, this form of explanation does not necessarily suggest that other students who did not react the same way had neither direct nor indirect experiences of racial discrimination. They might simply have taken a different approach to such visual texts because *reflexive readings* were only one of many options. In fact, only one of the two Hispanic groups expressed intense anger towards the photo of Bloody Sunday, and one Black group was more outspoken about their anger at the photo than the other Black group. Such differences could be explained in many ways. How students perceived the nature of the photo elicitation task could be as important as what type of reading they engaged in with a given photo. Students’ perceptions of the dynamics between the researcher and the participants, as well as between the participants could also have

made a difference because the act of revealing their expectations, desires, or prior experiences entailed vulnerability.

In summary, the discussion in this section illuminates how students' identities and their prior experience were influential in their meaning making of the achievements of a historical figure. While students' shared identity as U.S. Americans gave many of them a sense of pride or hope in responding to MLK's achievements, only students of color expressed their deep appreciation for his work. In addition, this section shows how considering MLK and the Civil Rights movement as Black students' own heritage helped explain their unique civic voices in emphasizing the balance between the bright and dark sides of the story of the Civil Rights movement.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout this dissertation study, I have attempted to listen to students' voices to understand more fully how who they are matters to their construction of commemorative narratives of MLK Day. Particularly, I have focused on finding those aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights movement that students consider important to know and attempted to make sense of why they think so. In Chapter 1, I explained the significance of this dissertation study by noting the unique status of MLK as a national symbol in American society as well as the special role of the MLK curriculum as a means of civic education in schools. In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed the theoretical background and method used in this dissertation study to understand and listen to racially and ethnically diverse students' ideas about a historical figure and event. Chapter 4 highlighted students' efforts to diversify their commemorative narratives of MLK Day by including a wide range of people for whom MLK advocated and who joined the Civil Rights movement. Chapter 4 also discussed students' various intentions in making such inclusions, from altruistic to self-oriented and even tactical. Chapter 5 shed light on many students' emphasis on the balance between the bright side and the dark side in their commemorative narrative of MLK Day. The findings of Chapter 5 also explored how students' identities and their lived experiences could explain their differing reactions to MLK's achievements as well as racial violence during the Civil Rights era. In this final chapter, I suggest some key implications that the findings of this dissertation study have for educators and researchers, and then discuss the limitations of this study and several elements to consider.

## Implications

### Scholarly Implications

This study found differences in students' ideas and affective reactions to multi-dimensional aspects of MLK and the Civil Rights movement. Students' identities helped explain many of these differences; yet, something more than identity was needed to make sense of some of them. In what follows, I first discuss the implications of the findings, showing the role of identity in shaping students' ideas and reactions. I then discuss what researchers can learn from the findings regarding within-group differences. This section closes with a discussion of some methodological implications of this study by highlighting the significance of the interview setting in using photo elicitation as a research method.

#### *Identity matters*

Consistent with previous studies (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Hahn, 1999), students in this study often exhibited a sense of pride or hope in responding to the glorious moments of the Civil Rights era. These positive affective reactions seemed to reflect their shared identity as U.S. Americans. Meanwhile, as also noted in previous literature (Epstein, 1998; Dimitriadis, 2000), most Black students in this study expressed their special thanks to MLK for the freedom that they enjoy today. Some Black students even felt privileged or relieved compared to their predecessors who had experienced severe racial discrimination, as shown in Tiara's remark: "You sit there and think, 'Oh my god, I'm Black.' If this was 100 years ago, my situation would be completely different." The Black students' such responses were understandable because they considered themselves to be direct beneficiaries of MLK's work. However, this study also found a deep appreciation for MLK's achievements among other students of color. In particular, Indeela and Shu (Asian students) and Camila's group (Hispanic students) exhibited tremendous

respect and gratitude for MLK's achievements. Indeela (an Asian female) claimed that young students should not take for granted what MLK accomplished. Raquel, a Hispanic female, even criticized young students for their lack of respect for MLK's work. Also, Raquel's group used *us* or *we* as they described what their predecessors' lives must have looked like during the Civil Rights era and what MLK's work meant to Hispanics at that time. After noting racial discrimination against their group in the past as well as in the present, Antonio, a Hispanic male, described the meaning of MLK to their Latino/a predecessors, saying, "He's a ray of sunshine in a thunderstorm."

These findings of Chapter 5 reconfirm previous studies showing students' positive affective reaction to MLK's achievements (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Hahn, 1999) and Black students' appreciation of and deep respect for him (Epstein, 1998; Dimitriadis, 2000). Yet, this study offers new insights into the connections that Asian and Hispanic students feel with MLK. In her study with four focus groups, Hahn (1999) found that students commonly called on the storyline of freedom and progress, national heroes like MLK, and authoritative documents such as the "I Have a Dream" speech to mark their identity as Americans. She suggested that this was one way that students grounded themselves in a national identity. While Black students' affinity for MLK has been often explained in terms of racial identity rather than national identity (Epstein, 1998; Dimitriadis, 2000), the connection that Asian and Hispanic students feel with MLK has rarely been understood as reflecting their ethnic identity. However, this study showed that although Asian and Hispanic students seemed to draw on their national identity to explain the historical significance of MLK and the Civil Rights movement, they also brought their ethnic identity to the work of interpretation and representation of such content as shown above. Particularly, some Hispanic students drew on their predecessors' experience of discrimination in

assigning meaning to MLK's work. As such, this study challenges researchers to consider the role MLK and the Civil Rights movement may play beyond serving as symbols of a national story of progress shared by all.

The present study also provides some practical implications for researchers with regards to using interviews as a means of investigating how students of color make sense of the story of the freedom struggle. This study shows that students of color are not likely to reveal their ethnic identity and lived experience in interpreting the Civil Rights story when being interviewed in a racially or ethnically heterogeneous group, like Hahn's (1999) focus group. This is because most students of color in this study anticipated that their peers might have a negative response to their chosen images for the MLK Day exhibition. Moreover, this study suggests that researchers' interview questions and follow-up questions are crucial to bring out the interplay between students' ethnic identity and their work with the recent past of the nation. Even though they were interviewed with other students from their own ethnic group, Antonio, Camila, and Isabel did not bring their ethnic identity to the elicitation task until I specifically asked them, "How do these images make you feel?" or "Are there any images that you feel a connection to?" Also, Manuel, a male in the other Hispanic group, began to talk about the meaning of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech to Latinos/as of Civil Rights era when I asked the follow-up question, "How did the speech impact the people in the past?" and "Who was impacted by the speech?" Therefore, this study encourages researchers to make a careful effort in arranging interview groups and developing interview questions, particularly when working with students of color.

In addition, this study sheds light on how students' identities can shape their differing reactions specifically towards the racial violence of the Civil Rights movement. Encountering the images of struggle and violence, some students of color exhibited anger, which was distinctive

from sadness or empathy. Helmsing (2014) notes that emotions are inherent elements of civics and history education in the U.S. According to Helmsing, empathy towards historical others has been the most frequently studied affective marker, particularly in history education. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Brook, 2011; Foster & Yeager, 1998), many students in the present study felt sad and empathetic at seeing the victims. However, this study also found that students' sadness turned into anger when some students of color (Black, Hispanic, and Asian) were reminded of present-day racism in the photo of Bloody Sunday. This anger was different from the sadness in that it was not merely evoked by the violent elements of the photo; rather, it seemed to reflect their clear awareness of the continuity between the past and the present. Their awareness seemed largely shaped by their lived experience of racial discrimination because the students who exhibited intense emotions spent a great portion of the interviews sharing examples of racial discrimination that they had experienced directly or indirectly. As such, this study expands our understanding of students' possible affective reactions to historical injustice by capturing the anger that some students of color felt at the images of racial violence in the past as well as by showing the potential influence of students' identities on such anger.

Furthermore, this study implies that the anger felt by students of color is fundamentally different from moral outrage. In his study of a U.S. history classroom, Wills (1996) found that learning the experiences of enslaved Blacks during the Civil War often sparked students' moral outrage in a predominantly White school; however, it rarely helped students understand "any continuous history of racism, discrimination, or prejudice experienced by Blacks in American society" (p. 379). Unlike such moral outrage, the anger that the students of color showed in the present study seemed like evidence of their clear awareness of continuing racism. Therefore, this

study encourages researchers to differentiate anger from moral outrage, particularly when studying the affective reaction of students to historical injustice.

This study also provides new knowledge about students' perspectives on MLK and about the potential influence of students' ethnic or class identities on their perspectives. In the previous studies, students mainly described MLK as a civil rights leader (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 1998; Wills, 2005). Consistent with the previous studies, the students in the present study also explained the significance of MLK's work by noting the expansion of civil rights to more people. However, the students in the present study differed in that they came to recognize MLK's work on behalf of other people of color and poor people, as well as his involvement in the Vietnam War, perhaps because the photo elicitation interviews provided students with some multidimensional aspects of MLK's work. Their encounters with some lesser-known images of MLK seemed to widen their understanding of MLK uniformly; however, they responded in diverse ways to this new information. In particular, some students' selectivity seemed reflective of their ethnic, and/or socio-economic class identities, as shown in the attention of Manuel (a Hispanic male) to MLK's support for Latino/a farmers, or in the emphasis that Katherine (a White female who self-identified as living in situational poverty) placed on MLK's advocacy for poor people. This finding regarding the interplay of students' identities and their perception of the lesser known work of MLK expands the previous studies (Barton & Levstik, 1998; Epstein, 1998, 2010) that have examined students' perspectives on MLK's work as a civil rights leader, which only looked at racial differences.

Finally, this study also shows how Black students' racial identity could help explain their strong emphasis on balance in representing MLK and the Civil Rights movement. This finding regarding the influence of racial identity is consistent with the previous studies (Epstein, 1998,

2000, 2001, 2010). However, this study expands the previous studies by examining the specific aspects of MLK/the Civil Rights movement that Black students thought should be told and how their justification was different from that of their counterparts. In particular, the Black students in the present study emphasized the importance of balancing the bright and dark sides in telling the story of the Civil Rights era more than any other groups (see Chapter 5). Also, their justification for including the dark side, represented by scenes of violence and struggle, went beyond some other students' moral responses to the victims. Instead of simply sympathizing with the victims, the Black students commonly expressed their concerns over the potentially negative consequences for young students of focusing exclusively on MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech and some glorious moments. The Black students did not want a falsely positive curriculum to mislead young students to believe the myth that social change can be made instantly by a heroic figure and the process of such change is always happy. These Black students' voices were more civic and political than moral, compared to the voices of their counterparts who mainly focused on the suffering of the victims. These Black students' voices were considered civic or political in that they emphasized the struggle as a part of achieving civil rights and were concerned about the potential misunderstanding that youth might have about social change. This finding encourages researchers to investigate further how Black students' historical understanding shapes their civic or political understanding of the contemporary society, particularly their perception of democratic social change.

#### *More than identity*

While the previous section focuses on the role of identity in shaping students' responses to a wide range of MLK-related images, this section attends closely to other factors that could help explain students' different ways of working with such content. Chapter 4 showed us some

variations within groups in their interpretations and representations of MLK and the Civil Rights movement. In particular, not all students from the working class or the situational poverty class necessarily emphasized MLK's support for poor people. Many of the economically underprivileged students did not feel the need to single out his fight against poverty. For instance, although both Katherine (a White female) and Dylan (a White male) self-identified as living in situational poverty, Dylan considered MLK's involvement in the "I am a man" protest or the Poor People's campaign as peripheral, unlike Katherine, who highly regarded this dimension of MLK's work. Also, not all Hispanic students assigned the same degree of significance to MLK's advocacy for Latinos/as. While Manuel emphasized the importance of remembering MLK's support for Latinos/as, and Raquel even blamed her school curriculum for omitting the relationship between MLK and Latino farmers' rights activists, Sofia paid little attention to what MLK had done for or with Latinos/as. Such variations within the same group in students' interpretations of MLK's multidimensionality are meaningful findings because they have not been noted in the previous studies. Here, I offer discussion of some of such findings.

I attempted to make sense of the variations in students' interpretations within the same group by drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of ideological becoming and utterance as citation. In the present study, although Sofia was also Hispanic like Manuel, she paid little attention to MLK's advocacy for Latino/a farmers' rights as he did. With regards to this finding, instead of simply ascribing their differences to their socio-economic class (Sofia self-identified as upper middle class whereas Manuel identified himself as working class), this study paid attention to Sofia's possible exposure to different discourses that Manuel had not engaged with. Based on the data, Sofia was the only student who had seen the photo of Bloody Sunday on or around MLK Day. According to Sofia, she had seen the photo along with several other photos of racial



violence from the Civil Rights era through her engagement in an MLK Day community service project. From Bakhtin's view, Sofia might have been developing her ideas about MLK's multidimensionality based on the different discourses about the Black freedom struggle that she had heard in her communities. This way of viewing students' ideas as being developed through dialogues with multiple discourses provides researchers with a possible way to make meaning of differences in students' interpretations of MLK, while avoiding arguing for a sort of identity determinism.

Yet, the application of Bakhtin's ideas to examining students' ideas about historical figures is not new. Barton and McCully (2010) used Bakhtin's notion of internally persuasive discourse when they studied Northern Irish students' dialogic engagements with multiple sources obtained through multiple channels. However, Barton and McCully (2010) state that they had difficulty finding evidence in the existing research that U.S. students also engaged in such a complex process of historical conceptualization. Then, Barton and McCully (2010) speculate that the differences between Northern Irish and U.S. students could be attributed to sociocultural differences between the two societies. However, Sofia's case presented above (along with Jasmine's case introduced in Chapter 4) implies that U.S. students also develop their ideas about the recent past by working with multiple sources and perspectives. The discussion regarding within-group differences also imply that the degree of complexity of students' historical conceptualization may vary, and such variations can be considered to stem from individual differences rather than group differences.

In addition, this study provides some methodological implications for researching more complex interactions among sources and perspectives in students' meaning making. From Bakhtin's (1981) view, our utterances are citations, which means students' comments are full of

others' words. However, in the present study, very few students explicitly mentioned the sources or perspectives that they drew on to make sense of the multi-dimensionality of MLK or of the Civil Rights movement. Rather, it required imagination to trace their sources and perspectives. For me, it was particularly helpful to stay with their seeming irrelevant or contradictory comments, for example, Jasmine's comments that MLK would like to tell her generation, "Don't get pregnant." Although I was not sure where that idea came from, I could at least attempt to speculate on how such ideas might shape her interpretation of MLK's advocacy for poor people. Likewise, researchers could benefit from paying attention to every possible clue in students' commentary that might tell us the sources or perspectives that inform their utterances.

Meanwhile, Chapter 5 presents the findings regarding differences among Black students in terms of their interpretations and representations of White protestors. Not surprisingly, many White students attempted to correct the perceived misunderstanding of Whites living in the Civil Rights era by presenting the presence of White supporters. Interestingly, Black students in this study also wished to include White supporters in their MLK Day exhibition. However, the two Black groups provided somewhat different justifications for their inclusion of such images. A group of Black students, like some Hispanic and White students, seemed to draw on moral imperatives such as "Tell a more accurate and truthful story," "Don't exclude someone from the whole story because she/he is peripheral," or "Remember the sacrifice of innocent people." For instance, the moral voices were pronounced in the comments of Jordan, a Black male: "But there were still people that were willing to speak out, and it shows that they actually made huge sacrifices. This man, it cost him his life but he still spoke out;" and in the comments of Nia, a Black female: "It shows how Whites were willing to die for our race too." Meanwhile, the other Black group's rationales for presenting White supporters did not come from these moral voices

(see Chapter 4). For example, Shanice and Tiara (Black females) described James Reeb, who was beaten to death by White men during the Selma March, as an exemplary White person. They expected that the display of his photo in the school lobby would teach their White peers that they were also a part of the Civil Rights movement, providing a sort of civic role model for them. It seemed that Shanice and Tiara's intention in displaying White supporters was neither altruistic nor solely self-oriented. Drawing on de Certeau's (1984) work, I interpreted these Black students' inclusion of White supporters as a tactic that was intended to lessen the perceived hostility of their school culture to their group by recruiting more allies. This interpretation regarding the Black students' intention implies that minority students' representations of the past could be viewed as tactics. Such discussion also challenges researchers to see students' ideas as evolving in a specific here and now, rather than as static or unidimensional.

According to Barton and Levstik (2004), people take part in the exhibition of historical content for various reasons, for example, "personal fulfillment" (p. 111), "accountability" (p. 113), and "service to others" (p. 118). Barton and Levstik (2004) note that just like curators, students also have a clear intention for their display of historical content, and their intention is often towards "others" (p. 119). Consistent with Barton and Levstik (2004), the students in the present study sometimes intended to serve others. For example, Claire, a White female, justified her inclusion of Latino/a marchers in the MLK Day exhibition by noting the need of other Latino/a students to feel a sense of belonging. Yet, the findings of this study also showed that students often attempted to reconstruct memory of the Civil Rights era to suit their current identity (see Chapter 4). The findings of Chapter 5 (mentioned above) even further challenge our understanding of students' representation of the past by illuminating the nuanced differences between the intention of Shanice's group for the exhibition and that of other students, which

were solely towards others or themselves. The discussion regarding such nuanced difference implies that minority groups of students might seek “interest convergence” of their group and other dominant groups through their exhibition (Bell, 1980).

#### *Regarding the Use of Photo Elicitation*

This section discusses the potential and the limitations of photo elicitation interviews as a research method based on the findings of this study. As Barton (2015) suggests, this method was useful to generate rich responses from students. However, as Barton and Levstik (2004) note, the success of photo elicitation interviews might depend on the setting. In their research on students’ understanding of historical significance, Barton and Levstik (1998) used photo elicitation interviews and found only few differences across groups. In reflecting on their previous use of this method, Barton and Levstik (2004) speculated that their previous findings could have been influenced by the interview context, considering researcher impact and peer impact. Barton and Levstik (2004) admitted that “minority students’ responses may have been constrained by their being interviewed along with members of other ethnic groups, or by the fact that each of the researchers was White” (p. 174).

In alignment with Barton and Levstik’s (2004) reflection on their research method, I suggest that the interview context matters. It is important to recall that students in the present study were interviewed with others of the same race or ethnicity. It is unlikely that the photographs of struggle and violence would have brought about the diverse emotional reactions and interpretations revealed in this study if those photographs had been shown in multicultural interview settings or typical classrooms. Unlike their White counterparts, the students of color commonly anticipated that the final set of images that they chose for the MLK Day exhibition

would be challenged by school authorities and even other students when attempting to display it in the school lobby. For instance, Sofia, a Hispanic female, expressed her concern by saying,

Mm-hmm. Because, even though most people don't like to admit, there still are a lot of racist people—and people—and even though times have changed, people still have those same beliefs as they did back then, and so I feel like putting them up, some people would maybe even, like, tear them down, or say mean things to people.

The negative anticipation that students of color had regarding other students' responses to the images of historical injustice might be wrong or might be the result of overgeneralizing from their previous encounters with a few racist individuals. The present study does not clarify this matter. However, it is important to understand how minority students' perceptions of school culture and other students' potential responses might impact their future participation in classroom activities as well as in interview tasks, particularly when addressing controversial topics such as racial discrimination.

### **Educational Implications**

While the previous section discussed some implications for researchers, this section focuses more on educational implications of this study. As noted earlier, many students in the present study sought to share a more inclusive story of the Civil Rights movement by including a variety of actors. Through their MLK Day exhibition, the students wanted to show a broader spectrum of MLK's advocacy beyond the Black community, although their ideas about who should be included varied. Some students particularly emphasized the importance of including poor people, while others wanted to include diverse racial and ethnic groups. However, the

findings of this study also showed a tension around diversifying the story. Some students' discussion revealed a tension between being inclusive and not Whitewashing (see Chapter 4). Despite such tensions, many students wanted to include White supporters in their final set of images for the MLK Day exhibition. In particular, Jordan, who self-identified as biracial, wanted to know more about White civil rights activists. Meanwhile, some Hispanic students and a few White students emphasized the importance of telling about the participation of Latinos/as in the Civil Rights movement. For instance, Claire, a White female, explained her inclusion of Latino/a marchers by noting the learning needs of Latino/a students, saying "...I was thinking about how it's so important for them to know that they were a part of it too".

These findings show students' desire to tell a more inclusive story of the Civil Rights movement as well as their different learning needs and interests. Although it seems almost impossible to satisfy such different students' learning needs, educators can gain from this study meaningful insights into how the curriculum can be more inclusive and relevant to students' lives. I also suggest that educators can benefit from considering the potential educational consequences of the simplistic "Blacks vs. Whites" version of the Civil Rights movement that the students claimed was mainly told in school. Though I do not have classroom observation data or interviews with teachers, students routinely described their school experiences of learning about MLK and the Civil Rights movement as having left them with some significant misunderstandings (see Table 9 in Chapter 4). They believed that such misunderstandings needed to be thoughtfully addressed by educators.

Students' claims about the narrowness of the curriculum reflect a wide consensus in social education research, which finds a dominance of celebratory and heroic narratives in the representation of MLK in U.S. history textbooks (Alridge, 2006) and in U.S. classrooms (Wills,

2005). Also, there are several studies that show teachers' silence on the negative past (Levstik, 2000; Wills, 2005). In particular, Wills (2005), in his study on how commemorative narratives of MLK Day were constructed in two elementary school classrooms, found that the teachers intentionally avoided talking about violence committed to non-violent protesters during the MLK Day lessons even when their students brought up such issues while expressing much interest.

More recent studies (Binnenkade, 2016; Brown & Brown, 2010) show that the curriculum is widening to include racial violence towards African Americans in textbooks as well as in classrooms. Yet, according to Brown and Brown (2010), the representation of racial violence in textbooks still has significant problems in that it often "render[s] acts of violence as the immorality of single actors or 'bad men doing bad things'" and tends to "portray violence as disconnected from the institutional and structural ties that supported and benefited from such acts" (p. 32). Meanwhile, Binnekade (2016) noted students' (including Black students') resistance to civil rights lessons with a focus on racial violence. Binnekade (2016) speculated that the students in her study might have resisted because they felt forced to feel and think in a certain way in responding to such lessons, for example, expressing empathy towards the victims.

Based on the findings of the recent studies (Binnenkade, 2016; Brown & Brown, 2010), it seems that the more critical issue regarding civil rights lessons in the U.S. is not *whether* to address the dark side of the Civil Rights era, but *how* to address the issue in classrooms. Listening to the Black students' voices heard in Chapter 5 could provide educators with an insight into how racial violence can be represented and discussed. This study found that the Black students emphasized the inclusion of the dark side of the Civil Rights era in the curriculum more strongly than any other groups. Yet, they seemed to distance themselves from any attempt to victimize African Americans who were treated badly. Instead of simply sympathizing with the

victims, the Black students put more emphasis on the collective agency of African Americans. They described the violent scenes from the Civil Rights movement as a necessary process for social progress. This finding implies that students' resistance to learning about racial violence might not necessarily mean that they are indifferent to the issue; instead, students might not like the way that schools represent racial violence towards African Americans. Therefore, this study encourages educators to reflect on their representation of the dark side of the Civil Rights era from the perspectives of students, particularly of Black students.

### **Limitations and Considerations**

Before closing this dissertation, I would like to draw readers' attention to some limitations of this study as well as some elements to consider. First, I want readers to note that this dissertation study does not provide a comprehensive view of what students want to commemorate on MLK Day or what they think is important to know regarding MLK and the Civil Rights movement. In this dissertation, I present the four most salient themes that emerged in the data. Other than the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, there were other themes that some students highly regarded, such as MLK's religion, his admirable character, and the democratic agency of ordinary people. While students' voices on these themes are also important, in order to provide a more in-depth analysis and more nuanced discussion of the findings, I made the decision to narrow the focus of this dissertation study to those four most salient themes.

Readers need to consider the strength and limitations of the set of eighteen MLK-related photographs that I used for the photo elicitation interviews in this study. Although I tried to include multidimensional aspects of MLK's ideas and actions in the set, I should admit that it could not cover everything, and that students' ideas were inevitably bounded by my selection of



photographs. Also, although the set of eighteen photographs was helpful in that the photos provided the students with a wide range of historical information in an efficient way, the set might be insufficient to provide them with an in-depth understanding of the meaning of MLK's involvement in lesser-known events. While many previous studies paid attention to the often-forgotten memory of MLK's commitment to economic justice and pacifism, only a few students in the present study noted the significance of his involvement in the "I am a man" protest, the Poor People's Campaign, or the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. However, this may not necessarily indicate indifference to such aspects of MLK's life and work. To fully understand MLK's commitment to economic justice and pacifism, students would need to study his social vision by reading his speeches or writings (e.g., his "The Other America" speech). In fact, most of the students in the present study had little prior knowledge of MLK's radical social vision, except for Raquel, a Hispanic female, who had an exceptionally multidimensional understanding of MLK.

In addition, although this study was not designed as a typical ethnographic study (accompanied by intensive field work), I attempted to situate students' ideas in their local contexts throughout this dissertation. I tried to capture the delicate nuances in students' utterances and to trace the source of students' ideas by sticking to the data and by drawing on relevant theories. However, I should admit that my interpretation of the data might be mistaken, and this area will need to be further explored through a follow-up study.

Throughout this dissertation, I have presented some students' critical understandings of their schools' representation of MLK and the Civil Rights movement, and their suggestions regarding the potential educational consequences of what they perceive as a curricular deficiency. Although I was not intending to idealize students' comments, I acknowledge the

value of their curriculum critiques. Yet, it should be remembered that students' claims about their school's curricular omissions are not proof that the formal or enacted curriculum actually has such holes. I would like to investigate further what students perceived as problematic in their school curriculum.

Although the title of this chapter is "Conclusions," my arguments in this chapter and the other chapters should not be considered definitive or finalized. In the spirit of Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, I will continue to dialogue with students' voices and other voices. I hope readers join in this continuing dialogue. I also hope that the students' voices heard in this dissertation stimulate and enrich readers' educational imaginations as they did mine.

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**APPENDIX A**

**INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS**

|    | Pseudonym | Year in High School | Gender | Race or Ethnicity | Socio-economic class            |
|----|-----------|---------------------|--------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1  | Jordan    | Junior              | Male   | Black/White       | Illusory Middle Class           |
| 2  | Nia       | Junior              | Female | Black             | I prefer not to answer          |
| 3  | Dylan     | Junior              | Male   | White             | Situational Poverty             |
| 4  | Claire    | Junior              | Female | White             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 5  | Shu       | Junior              | Other  | Asian             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 6  | Katherine | Junior              | Female | White             | Situational Poverty             |
| 7  | Indeela   | Junior              | Female | Asian             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 8  | Emma      | Junior              | Female | White             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 9  | Antonio   | Junior              | Male   | Hispanic          | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 10 | Isabel    | Junior              | Female | Hispanic          | Working Class                   |
| 11 | Camila    | Junior              | Female | Hispanic          | Lower Aspiring Middle Class     |
| 12 | Bradley   | Junior              | Male   | White             | Upper Middle Class              |
| 13 | Manuel    | Junior              | Male   | Hispanic          | Working Class                   |
| 14 | Abigail   | Junior              | Female | White             | Working Class                   |
| 15 | Molly     | Junior              | Female | White             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 16 | Raven     | Junior              | Female | Black/White       | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 17 | Sofia     | Junior              | Female | Hispanic          | Upper Middle Class              |
| 18 | Jenna     | Junior              | Female | White             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 19 | Heather   | Junior              | Female | White             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 20 | Tanner    | Senior              | Male   | White             | Situational Poverty             |
| 21 | Jasmine   | Junior              | Female | Black             | Situational Poverty             |
| 22 | Ebony     | Junior              | Female | Black             | Solidly Middle Class            |
| 23 | Raquel    | Junior              | Female | Hispanic          | Working Class                   |
| 24 | Shanice   | Senior              | Female | Black             | Upper Middle Class              |
| 25 | Tiara     | Senior              | Female | Black             | Risen from Poverty Middle Class |
| 26 | Aliyah    | Senior              | Female | Black             | Risen from Poverty Middle Class |
| 27 | Marquis   | Senior              | Male   | Black             | I prefer not to answer          |

## **APPENDIX B**

### **SOCIO-ECNOMIC CLASS CATEGORIES<sup>1</sup>**

1. Generational Poverty - The harsh conditions of this type of poverty may keep these families from breaking the barriers for generations.
2. Working Poor - These families live paycheck to paycheck, often in fear of being laid off.
3. Working Class - Generally these workers have more stable employment than the working poor. They may use their hands and bodies as a primary tool to do their work.
4. Situational Poverty - A crisis (e.g., health, divorce, etc.) results in an income drop causing these situations. They generally are able to make it back to middle class due to their assets such as education, family support, etc.
5. Risen from Poverty Middle Class - They have gained some resources. They often become the “safety net” for others (their immediate family, friends, etc.).
6. Illusory Middle Class - These Americans have houses, cars, TVs, etc., but they also have staggering debt associated with each possession.
7. Lower Aspiring Middle Class - Adults imitate neighbors with consumer purchases. Going to college is emphasized with children although they may not have gone to college themselves.
8. Solidly Middle Class - They own their home and have investments or business. Assume children will be college graduate/professionals.

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<sup>1</sup> \*Note: The twelve socio-economic class categories are adopted from the article “Can you name the U.S. socio-economic level?” by Donna Rae Scheffer, which was published in *The Washington Times* on December 31, 2014. This article was retrieved from <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/31/can-you-name-us-socio-economic-levels/> in September 2018.

9. Upper Middle Class - They have a higher income due to professional jobs and/or investment incomes.
10. Millionaire Middle Class - They have a net worth of over a million dollars, but have not mentally accepted their wealth.
11. Owning Rich - They own income-producing assets sufficient to make paid employment unnecessary.
12. Ruling Rich - They hold positions of power in major institutions of society and may live secluded lives or are protected from the general public.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*After obtaining assent, say:*

You may not know exactly about the life of MLK. That is all right. I'm not interested in whether you know about *him* exactly but in what you think about these images for MLK day. Our interview will have three parts. Before starting the first part, I would like to ask you to tell me about the story of MLK. (examples of follow-up questions: Where did you hear that story?, Has anyone heard a different version of that story?) Now I am going to show you 18 pictures that depict Martin Luther King himself, or people or events that are related to MLK (slideshow using my laptop). What images come to mind when you hear "MLK Day"? Would you say 'stop' if you see an image that is typically associated with MLK Day? Where have you seen this image? Would you explain what these images would stand for if they appeared in the context of MLK Day in the U.S.? If there are any images that you have seen on MLK day but I did not show you, please tell me.

*Once the students have completed the first part of the task, say:*

Now, I am going to give each of you a printed set of the images that you just saw on the screen. Take a few minutes to look at the images and read the captions carefully. Then, would you choose three images that you think need to get more attention on MLK day? Please write down on the paper the numbers of your three chosen images, along with the reason for your choice. If you have any questions about the images, feel free to ask me.

*Once the students finish looking at the images individually, say:*

It seems that everybody has finished. Does anyone need more time to look at them? Now, the last thing we are going to do is a group task. Let's suppose you are chosen as a team that is preparing for an MLK Day exhibition. Your task is to display images in the school lobby on this coming MLK day. There is limited space, so you need to select six images out of this set. This is a group task, so it is completely fine for you to talk with each other. Do you have any questions before we start? Once the students complete, ask: Would you explain your choices to me? Why did you decide to leave out the rest? (Pointing to some of the unchosen photos, I will ask them to explain their justification for such omissions). If you had been allowed to choose more photos, are there any others that you would want to post in the lobby for MLK day?

Additional questions:

You chose these eight images. If there were a theme for this set of images, would you call it, in just two or three words?

What do you want your audience to learn from this exhibition?

How do these images make you feel?

If you feel connection to any of these images, would you tell me about it?

When you try to display these images in the school lobby, do you think there would be any challenges you might face?

If you were to display images in different schools, do you think your choices would be different?

If you could do this kind of exhibition in other places besides at school, where else would you want to put it? Would it be the same?



## **APPENDIX D**

### **CAPTIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHS USED IN INTERVIEW TASK**

1 [Photograph of Rosa Parks riding on a bus] Rosa Parks's arrest on December 1955 after refusing to give up her seat for a White passenger is believed to have helped lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

2 [Photograph of African American woman with a box loaded, walking instead of riding the segregated buses during the Montgomery Bus Boycott] More than 40,000 African Americans joined the boycott against the policy of racial segregation. This boycott campaign lasted for 381 days throughout 1955-56.

3 [Picture of MLK featured on the cover of Time magazine (1957) for his leadership role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott] In December 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court had affirmed that segregated public bus systems are unconstitutional. The successful outcome of the boycott campaign brought national attention to MLK as a civil rights leader.

4 [Photograph of MLK attending the party celebrating Ghana's independence from Great Britain in March 1957] MLK had supported the independence of colonized countries in Africa as well as Asia, drawing attention to the colored people who had been oppressed under the yoke of Colonialism and Imperialism.

5 [Photograph of MLK behind bars in a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama] On April 12, 1963, MLK was arrested for violating the anti-protest injunction in the business section of Birmingham

and was kept in solitary confinement. In the jail, MLK wrote a letter defending civil disobedience and nonviolent direct actions that he and his followers took.

6 [Photograph of MLK waving from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial] MLK delivered his 'I Have A Dream' speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963.

7 [Photograph of marchers joining hands in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963] Nearly 250,000 people took part in the march to advocate for the civil and economic rights of African Americans, including 60,000 White participants. Among the participants, there were also thousands of Latinos — many of them Puerto Ricans from NYC.

8 [Photograph of MLK receiving the Nobel Peace Prize from Gunnar Jahn, the chairman of the Nobel Committee in Oslo, Norway, October 14 in 1964] The Nobel Peace Prize honors his acts "for the furtherance of brotherhood among men and to the abolishment or reduction of standing armies and for the extension of these purposes."

9 [Photograph of MLK talking with a family on their front porch during his door-to-door campaign] On July 21, 1964, MLK arrived in Greenwood for the beginning of a five-day tour of Mississippi towns, where he campaigned to get all African Americans to register to vote and support his Mississippi Freedom Democratic party.

10 [Photograph of MLK in Selma, Alabama leading a group of civil rights workers and advocates in prayer] MLK and others pray on the streets of Selma, Alabama on February 1, 1965 after they were arrested on charges of parading without a permit as they marched to the Dallas County courthouse as part of a voter registration drive.

11 [Photograph of John Lewis (foreground) and marchers beaten by state troopers in Selma, Alabama] In an event that would come to be known as "Bloody Sunday," voting rights marchers were severely beaten as they attempted to march to Montgomery for voting rights, on March 7, 1965. John Lewis was one of the civil rights activists who organized this march.

12 [Photograph of Rev. James Reeb] James Reeb (38), Boston Unitarian minister, was beaten to death by five White men after he joined protests for African Americans' voting rights in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965. He was one of the ministers who answered a call from MLK, for religious leaders from all over the country to join him in Selma after the violent confrontation.

13 [Photograph capturing voting rights activists leading the third and final march from Selma to Montgomery] On Sunday, March 21, 1965, about 3,200 marchers set out for Montgomery after a U.S. District judge upheld the right of demonstrators to conduct an orderly march.

14 [Photograph of president Lyndon Johnson shaking hands with MLK after he signed the Civil Rights Act] Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, which prohibited segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination. One year later President Johnson also signed the Voting Rights Act that prohibited racial discrimination in voting.

15 [Photograph capturing aides keeping MLK down to protect against further attacks] MLK was hit by a rock as he led a march protesting housing discrimination in an all-White neighborhood in Chicago, IL, on August 5, 1966. Afterward he noted: "I have seen many demonstrations in the South but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today."

16 [Photograph of MLK smiling and speaking with a reporter, ignoring shouting picketers] MLK came out against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. He officially launched "The Vietnam

Summer Project” with several colleagues at a press conference in Cambridge, MA, on April 23, 1967, seeking 10,000 volunteers to organize this peace campaign across the country.

17 [Photograph of Memphis sanitation workers holding the picket ‘I am a man’] Predominantly Black sanitation workers had started a strike, protesting poverty-level wages and poor working conditions in Memphis, Tennessee. To stand by these sanitation workers, MLK came to the town on March 28, 1968. However, he was assassinated by James Earl Ray, a White man, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, on April 4, 1968.

18 [Picture of a flyer for the Poor People’s Campaign of 1968] In December 1967, MLK announced the plan to organize the Poor People’s Campaign. From Latino farmers’ rights activists to White Appalachian coal miners, MLK sought to bring together low-income people of different races and ethnicities to fight for economic justice. Although MLK was assassinated on April 4, 1968, the Poor People’s Campaign went forward.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTION**

( ): description of a speaker's tone of voice or a speaker's nonverbal activity

[ ]: added text to clarify for the reader

...: omitted text from the original transcribed data

—: a speaker pauses to rephrase or self-correct

[crosstalk]: two speakers are talking over one another, so there were inaudible occurrences

[sic]: grammatically incorrect but has been transcribed exactly as heard in the audio recording

[P no.]: the number of photographs that a speaker points to while talking

[unintelligible]: indicates indecipherable sounds