“TRUE TO ME”:
CASE STUDIES OF FIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH
OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL VERSIONS OF HISTORY
IN A SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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by
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This qualitative study addressed the problem of students’ lack of trust of and interest in U.S. history and focused on students’ experiences with official and unofficial versions of history in the middle school social studies classroom. A collective case study of five African American students was conducted in an eighth grade classroom at Carroll Academy, a public, urban charter school in Ohio. Interviews, questionnaires, observations, artifacts, and logs were collected and analyzed with a critical, interpretivist lens.

The findings included: (a) the students were suspicious of the official historical story in the form of their textbook and teacher; (b) they shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the dishonest accounts in their textbooks, and the rationales changed in similar ways throughout the course of the project; (c) although they had limited experience with unofficial history before the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources; (d) the experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction between unofficial and official accounts in the classroom, and (e) students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history by the end of the study.
The findings of the study offer implications for teachers of social studies. By using family history projects, teachers can engage students while helping them learn critical and historical thinking skills. They can provide a more inclusive social studies curriculum and can better understand their students’ backgrounds and historical knowledge.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Carol Creek, who taught me how to dream big. I thank you for the million ways in which you have supported me (and yes, I mean 1,000,000—I have the data to back that up!). I am eternally grateful to you for all that you do, and more importantly, for all that you are. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

I love you, Mom.
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To God (who I, apparently, think will read this)—thank You! My heart is full, and I am so grateful. I sincerely hope that my work touches someone somewhere. There are voices that need to be heard and ears that need to hear. The moment has come for this chapter to close and for the next to open. Please bless this transition and help me ride the waves of change gracefully. Help me to keep my heart and mind open and to speak with integrity for those who are not heard. I envision great possibilities for the future of education.
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CHAPTER I
RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Defining the Problem

Many students in social studies classrooms today are taught with methods of persistent instruction, or teaching as telling (Cuban, 1993; Huston, 2009), about other people’s histories. Teachers are working with an encyclopedic epistemology whereby textbooks are seen as holding truth and a faith in the “right answer” exists (VanSledright, 2002; Wade, 1993). The majority of students learn about history through a curriculum that speaks with an omniscient voice about other people’s experiences (VanSledright & James, 2002, p. 291). It is no wonder that history is continually reported as the least-favored subject among U.S. students (VanSledright, 2008).

After reviewing the literature, VanSledright (2010) provided a description of the problems in social studies: (a) students have low test scores, (b) they hate history, (c) they are helpless when they confront conflicting sources, and (d) students of color are particularly suspicious of the content. Something has gone wrong and continues to go wrong in social studies classrooms today.

The most disturbing issue seen in the research may be the continuation of the “nation-building narrative arc” that permeates the history classroom (VanSledright, 2010, p. 13). The typical history textbook and curriculum favor a heritage narrative where White, middle-class, European American men’s stories are told (Lowenthal, 1998). The curriculum seems to be part of a “collective memory project” that is meant to socialize the young into passive Americans (VanSledright, 2010, p. 12). Many students’
experiences are not represented in this uncritical look at the past (Epstein, 1997). Students seem to be learning about heritage rather than engaging in history (VanSledright, 2002). The nation has adopted a problematic narrative that excludes many of the students in U.S. classrooms today.

If students continue to passively listen to a U.S. heritage story that has little relation to their own lives, then it is unlikely that the dismal situation in social studies classrooms will change. Teachers need to understand how students think and feel about the official version of history and to give students an opportunity to interact with unofficial history in meaningful ways.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I examine students’ beliefs about official and unofficial versions of history and explore the students’ relationship to the history curriculum as presented by their textbooks and teachers. I also investigate how students engage with unofficial history during the process of studying their families. I am particularly interested in African American children’s experiences with an official history that downplays and often eliminates their families’ pasts. In addition, the students’ reactions to the interplay between official and unofficial versions of history and their resistance to the grand narrative are considered.

A benefit of bringing unofficial history into the classroom may be the inclusion of rejected voices in history. Perhaps the study of family history can help to create an authentic multivoicedness (Wertsch, 1998) in classrooms. Stanley (2002) suggested that teachers enable students to explore their own pasts, construct their own narratives, and
then compare those narratives with other students’ narratives. Small narratives woven together may create an effective unofficial version of history that students find credible and inclusive. In so doing, teachers can let students choose which knowledge they study and bring their voices into the curriculum.

Family history has the potential for creating, documenting, and weaving together narratives that can add to and possibly counter the grand narrative in the U.S. History curriculum. Teachers can lead students through the messy endeavor of navigating official history with a critical eye. In this study, I documented the mediated actions of how students became agents in their learning of history through resistance rather than passive recipients of the grand narrative (Wertsch, 1998). Perhaps students can resist in productive ways in schools and in so doing, create a new narrative. Maxine Greene (1988) said, “There are always strangers, people with their own cultural memories, voices aching to be heard” (p. 87). There are student voices that are ready to fill the silences in history by investigating and sharing their families’ accounts of history.

Giroux (1996) posited a new mission for education that could be “linked to honoring the experiences, concerns, and diverse histories and languages that have given expression to the multiple narratives that engage and challenge the legacy of democracy in the U.S.” (p. 60). With family history, we may be able to honor our students and challenge the official version of the past.

Through a qualitative collective case study (Merriam, 2002), I examined how family history influences students’ experiences with the history curriculum. I explored students’ beliefs about official and unofficial versions of history and observed how they
dealt with conflicting versions of history. In addition, I observed their acts of resistance to the grand narrative. Five participants were chosen from a class, each as individual cases, within the context of the classroom.

**Research Questions**

After considering the existing literature and its gaps, I asked a main question:

*How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history?*

My subsidiary questions included:

- *What do students believe about official and unofficial history?*
- *What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?*
- *What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented by their teachers and textbooks?*
- *How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?*

**Research Design**

In this collective case study (Merriam, 1998), I collected data through interviews, observations, questionnaires, artifacts, and journals. I focused on five students, Jasmine\(^1\), Finn, Rihanna, Chris, and Tamara, as individual cases and then conducted a cross-case analysis. With an interpretivist, critical lens, I made sense of the data through an inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) where I recognized and clarified themes,

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\(^1\) The students each chose a pseudonym to ensure their privacy for the purposes of this study.
generated and structured codes, and checked my findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Five conclusions were drawn as a result of the analysis.

**Conclusion**

In this dissertation, existing literature about official and unofficial versions of history is examined. The published research regarding family history in the classroom is also reviewed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I discuss my theoretical framework as well as provide a detailed description of the data collection and analysis I conducted. In Chapter 4, I present the findings regarding students’ experiences with official and unofficial history. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of the study, its limitations, and the potential for changing students’ experiences in the social studies classroom.

**Definition of Terms**

*Family History/Genealogy:* For the purposes of this study, family history is considered a sustained investigation into students’ extended family and ancestors through the use of oral histories, photo and document analysis, and online research. Burroughs (2001) made a distinction between the two terms by defining genealogy as that which “tells you who your ancestors are, when and where they were born and died, who they married, and who their parents were” whereas “family history tells you what the ancestors did between birth and death and, hopefully, why they did it and how they felt” (p. 28). In this study, the words are similar since the students engaged in both processes simultaneously.

*Grand Narrative:* The typical U.S. History textbook and curriculum favor a heritage narrative where White, middle-class, American men’s stories are told
(Lowenthal, 1998). VanSledright (2010) called this story a “nation-building narrative arc” and claimed that it permeates the history classroom (p. 13). I use this term to describe the typical narrative taught in U.S. public schools.

Official/Unofficial History: Certain grand narratives become the official version of history in many nation-states. Wertsch (1998) defined official history as that which “is approved and produced by the state, and it is to be assumed to be the only, or at least the only true, history that a state’s citizens should learn in settings such as school” (p. 155). Official history can be found in the content presented by textbooks and teachers in formal history instruction along with the celebration of official holidays (Wertsch, 1998). Unofficial history involves any historical narrative not included in the official version.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to conceptualize my study, I needed to review literature from two distinct areas of research: grand narratives in history and family history. I first review the literature on grand narratives and specifically consider the concept of un/offiicial history. Next, I examine how these ideas play a role in the context of the teaching and learning of U.S. History. In the second section of the review, I consider studies that have been conducted in the field of family history in education and identify the gaps in the research. Finally, I speculate about how these two concepts, un/offficial history and family history, can be connected and used to inform my study. After a comprehensive review of the research, I have chosen to write about the studies that are most relevant to the topic of official and unofficial history.

Grand Narratives

The overarching concept of grand narrative, also called metanarrative, originated when postmodernism entered the intellectual public arena. In the 1950s, scientists and philosophers had begun to discuss the futility of the idea of the grand theories that had been widely accepted throughout history and solidified during the Enlightenment period. By the 1970s, philosophers questioned the grand narratives that were based upon the grand theories in science and society at large (Prickett, 2002).

In The Postmodern Condition, French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard (1979) defined postmodernism as a resistance to any kind of grand narrative. He encouraged a healthy skepticism about any truth claimed as universal. Grand narratives tell stories
about stories that constitute a specific kind of knowledge, or a particular way of being in
the world. The dismantling of these narratives was mandated by Foucault and other
critical theorists because the stories were created and reinforced by power structures.
Like myth, it is the function of narrative rather than its content that becomes significant
(Prickett, 2002).

Lyotard (1979) and others recognized the value of narrative in the human
condition. Lyotard called upon Jungian notions of personal narratives as necessary for
our mental health. In fact, Prickett (2002) explained that psychologists believe narrating
our own lives may be a condition of human consciousness and intelligence or, in other
words, the way our minds work. Lyotard believed narratives are also necessary to some
extent as long as they are recognized as subjective and limited (Pricket, 2002).

Grand narratives, also called public narratives, have been told since the beginning
of recorded history (Prickett, 2002). For instance, Homer’s oral epics were likely an
attempt to create a Greek identity. Many civilizations have used the narrative of their
nation’s history to create a common identity. When America was comprised of diverse
groups of immigrants, stories of the founding fathers were created and repeated to try to
acknowledged that democratic societies must have something in common, some form of
identity, in order to strive for a common good. So, if grand narratives are unacceptable,
yet narrative is necessary, what kinds of narratives would critical theorists and
postmodernists like to see?
Lyotard (1979) suggested that the grand narratives be replaced by *petits recits* or little narratives. These are localized and personalized small narratives that remain plural and competitive (Prickett, 2002). There is no overarching coherence to be achieved; instead, societies should strive for the “diversity, disjunctions, and contradictions favoured by postmodernists” (p. 33). This idea will become pertinent in the discussion about creating multiple versions of history in social studies classes.

I appreciate the descriptions of grand narrative in the literature, but I do agree with a major critique. Prickett (2002) described a kind of internal inconsistency in these philosophies. Lyotard (1979) suggested that a universal skepticism should be accepted and employed when looking at any grand narrative, except for his own. He seems to have posited his notions about grand narrative within a specific grand narrative of skepticism. This becomes a general problem with postmodernism, which only seems to find definition in what it is not. I suggest a skeptical lens be reflected back at Lyotard’s narrative as well.

**Official and Unofficial History**

Certain grand narratives become the official version of history in many nation-states. Educational psychologist James Wertsch (1998) defined official history as that which “is approved and produced by the state, and it is to be assumed to be the only, or at least the only true, history that a state’s citizens should learn in settings such as school” (p. 155). Official history can be found in the content presented by textbooks and teachers in formal history instruction along with the celebration of official holidays (Wertsch, 1998). The idea of official history falls under the umbrella of what Michael
Apple (2000) called “official knowledge.” He claimed that profound issues of power are embedded in what is considered legitimate knowledge. This claim will become important in the discussion of textbooks.

According to Wertsch (1998), unofficial histories are generally not supported by the state and are sometimes actively suppressed. These histories can be political, social, or otherwise, and they appear everywhere official histories exist. Unofficial histories exist across cultures and are used by individuals in different ways for different reasons (Wertsch, 1998).

Official histories are formed in very purposeful ways. Wertsch (1998) said that “the only access we have to the past is through its representation” (p. 323). Representing the past is the process of history. History philosopher, Hayden White (1987), claimed there are three ways one can represent history: annals, chronicles, and narratives. Annals are chronological listings with no plot; chronicles are unfinished stories with no conclusions; and narratives are stories told by historians (White, 1987). The narrative form is temporally organized and has a central subject, a plot with beginning, middle, and end, an identifiable narrator, and connects events and people into a structured whole. Grand narratives and official histories come together at this point because the histories are told in narrative form.

Wertsch (1998) drew upon Bakhtin (1986) when he explained that speech is a form of mediated action and that language is a cultural tool. So speaking, or writing, history becomes mediated action and narrative becomes a specific kind of cultural tool. This tool, in turn, shapes the history that is created (Wertsch, 1994). The words in a
historical narrative are chosen for specific reasons. “Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). The traditional claim in history is that a narrative is necessary for human memory (Bartlett, 1932; Beck & McKeown, 1994). Wertsch (1998) claimed that narrative may actually enable us to remember, but that it also constrains us in profound ways.

Narratives constrain history students in several ways. A narrator imposes an order that was never actually present in history. The narrative form of beginning, middle, and end is not taken from human experience but from “poetic ordering” (Ricouer, 1984, p. 67). The narrative form used in textbooks is particularly troubling for our purposes of viewing history. Wineburg (1999) said that the stylistic conventions of a textbook narrative reinforce the dangerous notion that most students believe—history is objective. Textbooks eliminate meta-discourse and documentary records, and they speak with an omniscient third-person voice. These conventions are not used accidentally.

The narratives in textbooks serve specific purposes. Fitzgerald (1979) noted that elementary and secondary students’ history textbooks serve a particular function, unlike most forms of history. They consist of “nationalistic histories” and “truths selected for posterity” that are written for instruction, not for exploration (p. 47). For example, the first U.S. History textbook was written after the Revolution and most texts since have focused upon the creation of the nation-state in a similar way. There is a certain legitimacy offered by textbooks that reifies the official history (Apple, 2000). But, this creates a problem. “What counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power
relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups” (Apple, 2000, p. 44). Apple stated that the struggles we see over textbook content really reflect wider questions of power and the definition of the common good. Thus, the official history presented in textbooks is in narrative form and is used to reinforce what the state sees as legitimate knowledge.

Because I agree with Wertsch’s (1998) notion that cultural tools can only be used by human agents, students are left to accept or reject the official history or grand narrative presented to them in school. Wertsch said that students and teachers can create a multivoicedness that echoes Bahktin’s (1981) heteroglossia, wherein students and teachers can create other voices in history besides the official narrative. This can take many forms including: replacement of the official history with an unofficial history, “means conflict” where two or more conflicting narratives are appropriated within a single text, or a complete acceptance of the official story (Wertsch, 1998, p. 99). There are options other than just organizing history around a single story line.

U.S. students do resist the grand narrative, but the resistance is limited and not robust, probably because they do not seem to have an alternative account (Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). I discuss the particulars of the American narrative and how specific groups of students have responded to that narrative in the next section. However, first, I would like to follow the advice of Keith Barton (2008) and examine the issue from a more global perspective. Wertsch (1994) reminded us that we must consider the consumption, not just the production of the powerful cultural tools of historical
narratives. A student has agency, so it is important to look at their responses to the
content at hand rather than just examining the content.

Countries all over the world have official histories with specific themes that
appear in school curricula. In Ghana, for example, students are presented with a national
narrative that boasts the theme of self-rule gained through service and struggle against
subjugation (Levstik & Groth, 2005). In Northern Ireland, the narrative consists not of
the story of progress of individuals that we see in other nations, but as the progress,
continuity, and decline of social and political movements (Barton, 2002). Although the
themes differ, each country has a particular official story.

In Canada, a particular account of history, which was adopted in the late 19th
century, is taught in the schools. Like the U.S. narrative, it begins with the arrival of the
Europeans and includes a story of nation-building and great men. The Canadian story
generally does not include the experiences of many of the students in the classrooms
(Stanley, 2002). “Few students are likely to identify with a curriculum that begins with
the exclusion of their peoples and continues by treating them as little more than scenery,
or as disrupters of the inevitable national progress” (p. 13). Nevertheless, the story
ensues.

Perhaps the most interesting recent research has been conducted in Eastern
European countries where Soviet Rule dominated for generations. From 1944–1991, the
Soviet government created a highly controlled and effective form of official history that
was taught in the schools in Estonia. This particular narrative was created in order to
wash away Estonian identity and to instill a common Soviet identity. Wertsch (1998)
interviewed many of the citizens in the 1990s, after Estonia declared independence, to find out what sense they made of the official history. He found that Estonians knew the official version of the history they learned in school in great detail, but they also knew an unofficial version that somehow remained viable throughout the years. The official history was crafted with an overarching coherence and a central theme. Teachers had to use a single state-mandated book and were forced to teach specific pages on specific days to ensure the universality of what children were hearing in school. However, this official version was believed “by virtually no one” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 165).

Because Estonians had no countertext, they had to resist in creative ways and actually organized the unofficial version as a quiet rebuttal to the official version (Wertsch, 1998). The version consisted of “a string of anecdotes and observations,” appeared “fragmented, partial, and unorganized,” and depended upon stories told by family members and private conversations (p. 159). The teachers and students found rather subtle ways to resist the narrative by using exaggeration and voice inflections, which were undetected by school monitoring. So, the students who were interviewed as adults “made a clear distinction between knowing an official version but not believing it, on the one hand, and knowing and believing an unofficial history, on the other” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 158). This research provides an excellent example of multivoicedness, or how the agent (student) plays a role in whether or not the cultural tool (official history) is accepted.
**America’s Official Grand Narrative**

After taking a global perspective, I now address the specifics of the U.S. version of history. The American grand narrative that is taught as the official history in classrooms is a story of great men in a “majestic march toward freedom and equality” (Apple, 2000, p. xii). Wertsch (1998) described a study conducted by O’Connor (1992), in which college students were asked to write an account of the origin of this country. The students universally wrote about a quest for freedom where the protagonists were identified as early European settlers who acted as historical agents in a superordinate position. After reading O’Connor’s (1992) interviews, Wertsch (1998) concluded that the American freedom-quest narrative is a “relatively rigid and tightly scripted cultural tool” (p. 107). Some students showed modest critique of the narrative and made references to groups of victims, but the freedom-quest narrative was still intact. About half of the students used tactics of resistance (de Certeau, 1984), but these were limited because students did not have an alternate narrative, and that narrative was rather exclusive. The American narrative had “an integrated and exclusionary structure that made it very difficult for other voices to participate in the production of the texts in any elaborate way” (Wertsch, 1994, p. 336). VanSledright (2010) tried the same activity with his undergraduate students and generated results similar to O’Connor (1992).

Students in America, as in other countries, seem to leave K–12 schools with a specific version of history remembered. Wertsch (1998) said that the official accounts are created as “schematic narrative templates” and are retained because “they can be compressed into succinct storylines, contain thematic elements that are seductive and thus
memorable, and can be easily repeated because they become tied to self-identification with core features of the storyline and what it represents symbolically” (VanSledright, 2010, p. 23). When Barton (1996) conducted research in an elementary school classroom, he realized that this narrative was already recognized as a story of progress and freedom by the age of nine.

The versions of history heard by VanSledright (2010) and Barton (1996) align with Gounari’s (2007) description of the American narrative:

The version of “true” history is (1) limited to the history of the United States and ignores its own, inextricable links to world histories, the ways in which the United States radically affects them and is affected by them; (2) has a “canonical” virtue to the degree that it is characterized as “shared,” “homogeneous”, and “worthy” and is promoted accordingly; (3) is western-centered and marginalizes other histories; (4) presents itself in disconnectedness with the current socio-historical order and the ideological weavings it entails; and (5) uses a dehistoricized language manifested through specific discursive practices that legitimize its supposed accuracy. (p. 98)

So, not only has America adopted an official history, but it is a problematic narrative that excludes many groups of people and lacks Wertsch’s (1998) multivoicedness.

Michael Apple (2000) is particularly concerned with how insidious and dangerous the history that Gounari (2007) described really is. In the USSR, we saw an official history that was proclaimed as nation-building and was outspoken in its aims. But, in the U.S., the knowledge and perspectives of less powerful people are now being incorporated
“under the umbrella of discourse of dominant groups” (p. 53). History textbook publishers, for example, are adding or mentioning minority groups but not restructuring the narrative for true inclusion (Apple, 2000). Because coherence in the original narrative is desired, many voices are left out or marginally mentioned (Wertsch, 1998).

Shklar (1991) claimed that this tension was nothing new. From the founding of the country, Americans have lived with extreme contradictions. While proclaiming equality and justice, European Americans, our “founding fathers,” actively oppressed Africans, Native Americans, and White women (Shklar, 1991). It is no wonder this tension cannot be resolved in the American grand narrative. It is an essential part of the American story.

Although there is a growing body of research in history and history education regarding the topic of international interpretations and examples of official grand narratives, there has been less detailed work that explores how these narratives play out in the U.S. classroom within specific ethnic groups. How do those who are not represented in the grand narrative respond to it? Are they more likely to create unofficial histories? From where do their unofficial versions come? What roles do families play in this creation? What kinds of resistance do specific groups of students show toward the grand narrative? These are questions of interest for my research and necessitate a review of the existing literature on student interpretation and resistance.

**Student Interpretation of the Grand Narrative**

I have mentioned that U.S. students do not have any robust or particularly effective ways of countering the official history that they learn in schools (Wertsch,
1998). However, particular groups of students seem to resist the story more than others. In my research, I look at how students of color interact with, accept, and resist the narrative in which they are “little more than scenery” (Stanley, 2002, p. 13). What role does student identity play in their historical thinking and interpretation of the grand narrative?

The most prolific researcher regarding this issue has been Terrie Epstein (1997, 1998, 2000). Epstein and Shiller (2005) recognized that students’ backgrounds serve as a filter in the history classroom. “Identities and affiliations influence if, how, and how much young people engage with social studies teachers and texts in schools and how much they learn from school subjects” (p. 201). As mentioned earlier, a limited body of research exists that adds credence to Epstein’s comments. Her work, along with Levstik and Barton (1996), Seixas (1993), and VanSledright (1995), begins to explore the issues of how particular groups of students interact with the grand narrative. This work, although limited, does give us a glimpse of how official and unofficial histories play out in the classroom.

Levstik and Barton (1996) found that students’ interpretations of historical sources were affected by their backgrounds. While guessing at the meaning of a picture of Vietnam War protestors interacting with police officers, African American students believed the rally was for civil rights and that the African Americans in the picture must have been in a dangerous position. The White students in the class believed they were viewing a picture from the Civil War era. Very different interpretations seemed to follow race lines.
Seixas (1993) conducted research at a Canadian high school where he examined how individual students judged historical significance. He found that students’ backgrounds played a role in their choices. “Students’ families and life experiences related to ethnicity and/or immigrant status have significant effects on shaping these young people’s ideas about historical significance, agency, change, and empathy” (p. 29). For instance, a student who emigrated from Hong Kong found that the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong during WWII was very significant to Canadian history. A Chilean immigrant identified the 1973 coup against Salvador Allende as quite significant. Students’ backgrounds affected their interpretations of history.

VanSledright (1995) claimed that race impacted students’ evaluation of content in history class. Latino and African American students found little purpose in studying the European settlement of colonial America. The White students in the same classroom found colonial history interesting and important. Later research by Almarza (2001) supported VanSledright’s findings. Mexican American students found U.S. history mostly irrelevant to them. Race plays a role in regards to relevance and significance in the history classroom.

Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) investigated a group of Sioux Indians. Although they were trying to identify students’ motivations for studying history, which is a slightly different topic, they did examine how their race played a role in interpretation of history. They found that the Sioux were more likely to explore family history than White students. Sioux parents taught their children that situating themselves in the broader historical context in which they learned at school was critical. So, these children learned
to create an unofficial history within the context of the grand narrative. This was the only research I found that linked unofficial history in the classroom with family history, although the authors mentioned this incidentally in their larger study of student motivations and failed to make any explicit connections between the two ideas.

Epstein’s (1997, 1998, 2000) work provides the most extensive view of the topic. She found that African American students were able to live with a sort of “double historical consciousness” (1997, p. 30) wherein students knew the official history but also retained a sort of unofficial history as well. This echoes the work mentioned earlier by Wertsch (1998) in Estonia where citizens knew two distinct versions of their history. Epstein’s (1997) students, like the Estonians, were aware that the official version embodied in their textbooks did not tell the whole story. They did not trust the credibility of secondary sources like their textbooks as their White counterparts did. African American students found their family members to be the most credible sources followed by their teachers and documentaries. Textbooks were low on the credibility-ranking list. Dimitriadis (2000) came to similar conclusions about African American students’ views of textbooks as less than credible. These students also bought into the nation-building story of America less than the White students (Epstein, 1998). They were more critical of the grand narrative and the texts that supported and helped to create this narrative.

In a rare comparative study, Epstein (2000) assessed students at the beginnings and ends of their 5th, 8th, and 11th grade years, the years in which they studied U.S. History in the curriculum. She looked at what influenced students’ beliefs about history. At both the beginning and ending of the year, African American students named Whites
as aggressors in U.S. history, whereas White students talked of slavery and segregation but downplayed the role of Whites. African American students were generally more critical of the grand narrative and, interestingly, they critiqued Europeans in relation to Native Americans as well. Epstein found that the pre-instructional interpretations with which African American students entered the grade-level remained relatively steady, regardless of the official version that was taught in class. In other words, the unofficial history acquired from family members and peers played a stronger role in students’ attitudes than did the teacher and curricular materials. Students resisted the official history and maintained some version of an unofficial history.

This research matters because students’ prior beliefs about history play a role in how and what they learn in the history classroom. Investigating students’ backgrounds with them in order to discover the filter they bring and the history that matters to them is an overlooked and underutilized classroom practice. “Teachers who understand the perspectives that underlie students’ historical knowledge may be better equipped to support and broaden the historical knowledge that young people carry into the classroom” (Epstein & Shiller, 2005, p. 203). Their backgrounds can be studied in place of or in comparison to the grand narrative (Epstein & Shiller, 2005).

**Critique of Grand Narrative Literature**

The research regarding student identity in relation to the grand narrative is limited, but intriguing. I see three general problems with the studies conducted. These issues have served as warnings to me for my research.
First, each of these studies looks at one or two points of time in a students’ life. The process of how these beliefs become accepted, or how the official and unofficial histories interact over time, has not been explored. This is similar to the critique that Barton (2008) raised about research in historical thinking in general. Processes cannot be analyzed when a researcher glimpses a single moment in time. The interactions of students, teachers, and historical content need to be watched carefully, and students need listeners that can perceive changes in their thinking over time. I interacted frequently with the same students over an academic quarter to attempt to gain a more nuanced view of how change occurs, rather than just conducting pre- and post-data collection. I am interested in the details of students’ daily experiences and how change occurs rather than just broad opinions and understandings.

A tension I see in the research has not been adequately addressed. As Barton (2008) suggested, diverse groups of students need to be studied with the results disaggregated by race. Epstein (1997) also claimed that there was very little research about racial or ethnic group differences or variations in students’ historical thinking and that more was needed. I agree because race matters in these issues. However, this is how stereotypes are born. Perceiving patterns in a group of people does not indicate that any one specific person in that group will possess that trait. I want teachers to become more sensitive to individual differences regarding race, but not to over-generalize. As Sleeter (2008) stated in her article about family history, “It is important not to attempt to draw

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2 The exception here is Epstein’s (2000) study when students were interviewed in three different years; however, the data collection still took place in pre- and post-settings rather than within the context of the students engaging with history.
sweeping generalizations from any story, but rather to allow the stories to converse, and
the disjunctures to sit alongside one another, generating questions for further
consideration” (p. 122). I am aware of the potential for sweeping generalizations in this
kind of research. I have not seen this disclaimer made in most research. Perhaps it is an
assumption, but I think it is important enough to state explicitly that trends seen in a few
African American students’ experiences do not apply to all African Americans.

Finally, many claims are made in the research that unofficial history is learned
from family members; however I have not found any research that looks at the process of
that learning. Aside from one survey (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998) that asked how
students learn about history in informal settings, I have found no other research that
investigated this topic in America. Qualitative studies that have more of an ethnographic
approach are needed in order to observe how families create and pass on unofficial
versions of history, and to determine why students often find more credibility in families
than in school curricula. This review of research and identification of this gap have
prompted me to investigate students’ beliefs about their families’ interactions with
history and how stories are passed down. What happens in the classroom is greatly
affected by what happens outside of the classroom, so researchers should probably
consider meaning-making within both environments. I used the three lessons learned
through the review of literature in my study.

Family History

Although family history was briefly mentioned in the un/official history literature,
I now provide a comprehensive overview of how family history has been studied in the
classroom. The purpose of this part of the literature review is to answer the following questions: (a) Have teachers been using family history in their classrooms? (b) If so, what kinds of lessons and projects have teachers attempted and in what kinds of classrooms? (c) What academic, historical, and affective outcomes resulted from their studies? (d) If the outcomes are indeed significant, what makes family history a powerful teaching tool? (e) Are there any reasons not to use family history in the classroom? (f) Are there sufficient data to fully answer these questions, and if not, what research still needs to be done? In the following synthesis of journal articles and books, I attempt to answer these questions.

“Looking at history through the textbook is like seeing a whole tapestry. Using genealogy magnifies each thread and shows us history up close” (Aaron, 1992, p. 7). So, how do we find our threads and separate them from the others? Of what do these threads consist? The answers to these questions are found in the study of genealogy and family history. As mentioned earlier, Burroughs (2001) made a distinction between the two terms by defining genealogy as that which “tells you who your ancestors are, when and where they were born and died, who they married, and who their parents were” whereas “family history tells you what the ancestors did between birth and death and, hopefully, why they did it and how they felt” (p. 28). For the purposes of this study, I consider both genealogical and family historical research in generally the same way since the classroom teacher intertwines archival facts with family stories.
History of Genealogy in the Classroom

There seems to be a lack of information regarding the history of the use of genealogy in the classroom. The single piece of literature I found that addressed this issue was an online article from World History Connected, which is published by the University of Illinois. Laichas (2005) found that genealogy historically has been used only by the elite in order to make claims to noble lineage for political and economic reasons. He traced the beginning of any substantial use of family history in the classroom to the 1970s and credited Alex Haley’s publication of *Roots*, a book that was turned into a mini-series, for the sudden general interest in family history. He also noted that the development of university courses in anthropology, sociology, and local history in the 1960s helped create a demand for genealogy that trickled down to the high school level. Since oral histories, folklore collection, and ethnography production were required in these courses, he claimed that it made sense to use genealogy. Laichas saw the growth of the Internet responsible for the continued use of family history by the public and by teachers since accessibility to information has surged.

If the information about the history of the use of genealogy is limited, it seems logical that our next question should be: Is genealogy being used in the classroom today? Unfortunately, there seems to be little agreement among history educators as to the answer to this question as well. Barton and Levstik (2004) said that educators “frequently” recommend family history projects, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, but then went on to say that “it is difficult to assess how widespread such practices are, but in our experience, they appear relatively uncommon” (p. 47). On the
other hand, Laichas (2005) said that “hundreds of high school and college courses require genealogy projects” that include “interviews, document analysis, and family charts” (p. 4). Dublin (1997), a professor at SUNY Binghamton, says that by not using genealogy in the classroom, “College faculty . . . are missing countless opportunities to enrich their classes and reach students in effective ways” (p. 61). None of these authors offer empirical evidence for their claims of the frequency of use of family history projects.

Examples of Family History Projects in the Classroom

Although it is unclear to what extent family history is being used in the classroom, the majority of the literature includes examples of actual lessons and projects that K–16 teachers have used in their classes. Many of these projects were interdisciplinary and relatively elaborate. Three of the projects reviewed were used in elementary-aged self-contained classrooms. In her multi-aged class of 29 third through fifth graders, Melendez (1999) created a family heritage project that included individual family trees, written summaries, and a class immigration bar graph and map. Josephine Barry Davis (2003), a fourth grade teacher, developed a 90-day project which included living family members’ biographies, family trees, a class map of countries of origin, country-of-origin profiles, and primary document timelines. Stacia Czartoski (Czartoski & Hickey, 1999), a fifth grade teacher, worked with M. Gail Hickey, a university professor and published author, to create a personal heritage project in her classroom. The educators noticed during their planning for the project that a lack of instructional materials about cross-cultural studies existed. The goal of their project was for each student to develop his or her own family history book that would contain an
autobiography, information about cultural and family heritage, and photographs. As a culminating activity, the class discussed the similarities and differences in family units, homes, experiences, beliefs, values, and goals. The elementary units seemed to all involve significant amounts of writing, often depending upon interviews and oral histories.

The majority of projects discussed in the literature were implemented in middle school classrooms. Joseph H. Johnson (1988), a middle school social studies teacher, suggested an activity in which students created a booklet that included: personal information, a family map, a chart of family members that corresponds with historical events, an interview, and a community history. John Marshall Carter (1995), a middle school history teacher, assigned a nine-week family history project called “The Grandma Book” to his students (p. 92). Students were instructed to choose a theme such as holidays, vacations, or celebrations and then requested written memoirs about this topic from several family members. They then synthesized the information in order to create a newspaper article about the memoirs that they presented to the class. Each student included a poem and timeline in his or her project presentation as well. A seventh grade teacher, Cindy McCachern (1999), guided her students through a unit about family history that involved the analysis of primary sources, a trip to the local historical society, and the creation of family history books. In order to show that students’ families were involved in important events in U.S. history, eighth grade teacher, Wilson Wylie, with the help of university professor, Mary Haas, developed a project called “The Family History Coat of Arms” (Haas & Wylie, 1986, p. 25). The students interviewed family members
and recorded information on a coat of arms design. When the students convened to share their findings, Wylie led the students through several synthesis questions in order to find patterns in the experiences of the students’ families. Patricia Velde Pederson (1998) created an activity for her eighth grade students called the “Four-Generation Project” (p. 158). Pederson wanted to design a project that would not disadvantage adopted children, so she encouraged students to pick a theme like conflict, fashion, reform movements, or politics as the context for their studies. They were then asked to interview people from four different generations, inside or outside of their families, about their chosen theme. The project culminated with a final paper. The middle school projects differed from the elementary school projects by including contextual frameworks and synthesis activities.

After a comprehensive review, I found only one dissertation published on genealogy. It was also the only publication found that took place at the high school level. Hayes (2002) interviewed 80 students, teachers, and administrators at a high school after two classes conducted family history projects. After a literature review revealed a claim of 65 benefits from various articles and books on genealogy, Hayes was able to confirm 57 of the positive outcomes during his study. This was the only empirical research I found regarding the use of family history in K-12 education.

Four college professors wrote about the use of family history projects in their courses. Thomas Dublin (1997) has been using genealogy in his courses since 1977. When discussing the use of family history in his classes, Dublin (1997) said that immigration and ethnicity are important issues in history and these kinds of approaches lend themselves to the topics. Throughout his course each semester, he encourages his
students to contact as many family members as possible and to collect family oral traditions. He offers a workshop for his students with a reference librarian to show them how many research resources are available. The students are instructed to make connections between the broader themes in the course and their own families’ experiences and to present their findings in a research paper. Dublin (1997) edited a collection of his students’ writing in a book called *Becoming American, Becoming Ethnic: College Students Explore Their Roots* published in 1994 by Temple University Press. John R. Gillis (2001), another college professor, used family history in his anthropology course called “Your Family in History” (p. 31). Gillis’ students conducted ethnographic research on some dimension of their own families’ culture. He insisted that students trace at least three generations so they could chart change over time. The students were then expected to provide a historical explanation for the changes they discovered so that their families could be placed into a broader historical context. Penn State English professor, Jack Smith (1998), used family history in his elective multicultural literature course in order to encourage his students to bolster knowledge of self and to become skilled in primary research.

Finally, Christine Sleeter (2008) wrote about what she called “Critical Family History” in her Social Foundations classes for pre-service teachers. She wanted her students to understand themselves as culturally and historically located beings and to work to change institutional discrimination. She found that when she used family history as a learning tool, though, her primarily White students decontextualized their family stories or tried to simply insert their stories into the grand narrative. In order to address
this issue, Sleeter created a framework that drew upon critical theory of the Frankfurt school, critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and radical humanist feminism. She encouraged her students to examine issues of power and privilege within their own stories, and she asked the question, “Can a critical examination of one White family’s history prompt public reflection?” (Sleeter, n.d., ¶ 8).

As described, teachers do use family history in their classrooms, but that is not the only place in schools where family history research can be found. Charles Humes (1994) claimed that family history research can be a valuable tool for school counselors to use with students. He suggested that counselors consult with social studies and English teachers since students need to conduct research. He pointed to a sense of “rootlessness” and a lack of self-identity in students and saw the study of family history as a possible solution to these issues (p. 298). This may seem like a novel approach to use in counseling, but in his book, *Family Therapy*, Levant (1984) pointed to several studies about the use of family history research in therapy. He described some possibilities for use of family life chronicles and use of family reunions. These examples show that family history has been recognized as useful by some teachers and therapists, but the frequency of use has not been widely studied.

**Academic, Historical, and Affective Outcomes**

Many of the teachers I mentioned described the effects of the projects on their students, both intended and unintended, at the ends of their articles. Researchers also offered descriptions of observed effects in general articles about family history. Below, I summarize these effects in three categories: academic, historical, and affective outcomes.
I have separated historical from academic outcomes because the historical concepts learned go beyond simple academic skills to changes in broad conceptual understandings that deserve to be explained in more detail.

**Academic outcomes.** Researchers and teachers claimed that the process of researching families resulted in the learning of many skills and ideas. The claims spanned from overall improved academic achievement (Hickey, 1999) to very specific lists of learning outcomes (Dublin, 1997; Hickey, 1991; Hickey, 1999; Johnson, 1988; Laichas, 2005; Olmedo, 1997; Olson & Gee, 1989). Many of the learning objectives and outcomes referred to the use of oral histories specifically in family history units. “Oral history projects are legitimate ways of addressing the objectives of the curriculum of our elementary and secondary schools” (Olmedo, 1997, p. 52). The benefits of teaching family history were noticeably interdisciplinary (Hickey, 1991; Hayes, 2002) and often involved reading and writing outcomes. Skills gleaned from oral history projects included: reading from a variety of sources, evaluating authenticity of information, resolving conflicting information, selecting important ideas from critical reading, taking notes, recognizing causal and sequential relationships, drawing conclusions from a variety of sources, and synthesizing and evaluating information while extracting facts (Olson & Gee, 1989). Other reading and writing outcomes that developed from family history projects included: manipulating information through graphic organizers and improved interviewing, proofreading, and editing skills (Hickey, 1999). Dublin (1997) noted that the Language Arts’ themes of identity, personal growth, and conflict and change are also developed through family research. Authors agreed that extensive
research skills are needed to undertake any significant family history project (Hayes, 2002; Johnson, 1988; Laichas, 2005; Olmedo, 1997; Smith, 1998). Furthermore, because oral history reports often contradicted one another, claims were made that genealogical research can enhance critical thinking and deductive reasoning skills (Hayes, 2002; Hickey, 1991; Olmedo, 1997).

**Historical outcomes.** The literature described numerous social studies objectives that could be achieved through the use of family history ranging from gaining specific skills to understanding broad historical concepts. Czartoski and Hickey (1997) pointed out that students explore three of the 10 strands recommended by the National Council for Social Studies when they engage in family history including: (a) Culture; (b) Time, Continuity, and Change; and (c) Individual Development and Identification (p. 11). Aaron (1992) stated that “genealogy helps history reach its highest potential. It becomes relevant. . . . Genealogy helps history become contextual” (p. 5). Pederson (1998) saw one of the most important goals of family history as nurturing the ability to put historical facts into context. History becomes the context in which we can examine our own lives, and that allows us to see ourselves from new perspectives (Cooper, 1996; Czartoski & Hickey, 1997; Olmedo, 1997).

Students gain a greater understanding of historical concepts as well (Hickey, 1991; Olmedo, 1997). Carter (1995) stated that family history projects increase students’ sense of “historicality” which he defined as “a sense of empathy for peoples of the past,” a vital purpose of social studies (p. 92). Aside from making history more interesting, Hayes (2002) claimed that he witnessed students trying to humanize history and relate to
it in a way they had not before. Another concept addressed by family history was the idea of continuity. Aaron (1992) described how children began to understand that history “is a line, not a series of dots” (p. 5). Hickey (1999) expanded on this idea by explaining that in the use of family timelines, students “notice trends, consider cause and effect, and become aware of chronological relationships between and among events” (p. 75). She said that students began to gain a sense of the passage of time. Helping students to understand their location in time and space is an important goal in social studies, which often does not happen with textbooks (Johnson, 1998).

Family history and more specifically, the use of family timelines, “invites young students to see the threads of their own lives and family members’ lives as part of the historical fabric of their country” (Davis, 2003, p. 13). It allows students to see that, “History entails the lives of ordinary men and women” (Dublin, 1997, p. 63) and to gain “a sense of how American culture has evolved from countless individual stories that reach back across many generations to many lands” (Melendez, 1999, p. 6). Cooper (1996) claimed that when students saw the influence of many individual perspectives on historical memory and interpretation, it taught them to deal with abstractions as well.

Perhaps the most important historical outcome claim that students learned from family history was to begin to think like an historian (Carter, 1995; Czartoski & Hickey, 1997; Hickey, 1991, 1999; Olmedo, 1997). Students generally see themselves as removed observers in history, but when family history was introduced, it involved students in the actual historical process (Carter, 1995). Carter explained that when students conducted interviews and recorded oral histories, they were engaging in the acts
of an historian such as: collecting primary sources, organizing and reading documents, and interpreting the sources based on their analyses. He said, “Students learn firsthand about their relatives and their relatives’ written reconstructions of a past historical event” (p. 93). Czartoski and Hickey cited the research of Brophy and Alleman (1996) and Levstik and Barton (1997) that said active inquiry, such as examining primary sources, is a meaningful way to address misconceptions and to increase historical understanding (p. 11). Hickey (1999) said that students are acting as historians when they investigate and record real events from the past through the memories of real people which encourages them to think critically. Olmedo (1997) recognized that undertaking genealogical research shows children that history is a process that requires them to make judgments about what really happened and to sort through conflicting evidence before reaching a conclusion. The authors claimed that family history engages students in grappling with significant historical concepts.

Family history also allows children to develop various disciplinary skills and interests (Hayes, 2002). Davis (2003) and Hickey (1999) encouraged teachers to use family history to develop skills in geography, particularly in the use of maps. Davis also pointed out that family history forces students to create a chronological understanding of major events in U.S. history. Carter (1995) stated that children become curious about economics and social and political history when reflecting on their families’ histories. Mintz (2001) was more specific when he stated that family research allows students “to see how shifts in their family’s naming patterns, marriage patterns, and fertility and mortality rates mirror social and demographic transformations” (p. 18). Each author
claimed that genealogy helps with different social studies skills and agreed that history becomes “more meaningful, real, and personal” (Pederson, 1998, p. 158) and that it “gives us a clearer and deeper understanding of history” (Burroughs, 2001, p. 37).

One of the most frequently cited benefits of studying family history was an increase in multicultural awareness and understanding. James Banks (1989) provided guidelines for integrating content about ethnic groups and to teach effectively in a multicultural environment. One of his guidelines was to share one’s ethnic background with one’s students and to motivate students to do the same. He said this sharing “will result in powerful learning for your students” (p. 204). Olmedo (1997) agreed that using family history can be an authentic way of providing a multicultural curriculum that goes deeper than what Banks (1989) called the heroes and holidays approach. Gillespie (1995) added that by using family histories, we allow a wide variety of voices into history. Students can recognize the differences and similarities between ethnic groups (Olmedo, 1997) and can “arrive at an objective, yet personal understanding of the variations in ethnicity surrounding them and in the experiences that make up American history” (Davis, 2003, p. 13). Students can come to terms with their own ethnic identity and then review their changing relations to the broader U.S. culture (Dublin, 1997). Czartoski and Hickey (1997) and Hayes (2002) claimed that students gained a greater appreciation for other cultures. Czartoski and Hickey (1997) also noted that, through the process of their research, their students recognized that diversity was all around them and experienced “a slowly changing attitude about other cultures and ethnic groups” (p. 15). Kennedy (1995) noticed a similar trend. “What seems to come of this research is an understanding
that binds, rather than separates, the class” (p. 18). He saw a growing sense of compassion for others’ families in his classes.

There is great potential for using family and oral histories with immigrant students and students with Limited English Proficiency (Olmedo, 1997). This is important for social studies teachers since multicultural school populations often do not see themselves as part of U.S. history (Olmedo, 1997). The use of oral histories not only enhances the curriculum with multiple perspectives, but involves the students’ parents in the educational process. Olmedo claimed that these kinds of activities make the curriculum more accessible for LEP students and help them to develop language skills while integrating their culture and families into their school experience.

**Affective outcomes.** “Who you really are, in part, is defined by your origins and roots” (Humes, 1994, p. 296). When viewing genealogy from a psychological perspective, Humes said that self-identity problems can come from a feeling of “rootlessness” and “a lack of connection with the past” (p. 299). Humes encouraged school counselors to use family history with students because it helps with the process of self-identification. When speaking of middle school students, McCachern (1999) noted that her family tree project “allowed students to discover their identity at an age when most are searching” (p. 12). “Students find that searching for their ancestors is to search for themselves” (Aaron, 1992, p. 5). Students not only experienced greater self-identification, but in many cases, a greater sense of self-worth (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Burroughs, 2001; Hayes, 2002; Hickey, 1991, 1999; Humes, 1994; Olmedo, 1997; Olson & Gee, 1989). When speaking of the “genealogical search,” Humes stated that,
“The quest, itself, leads to a sense of identity, pride, and self-esteem” (p. 297) and suggested using genealogy with students who feel devalued or unsuccessful. Hickey (1999) cited Campbell’s (1996) claim that when children’s cultural experiences are built upon, they demonstrate “improved skills, abilities, and self-worth” (p. 1). Barton and Levstik (2004) suggested that students not only build a greater sense of self-esteem when studying their family history, but they also “show strength in the face of adversity” (p. 47). Burroughs (2001) noted that genealogy builds pride and self-esteem, particularly in African American students, and that genealogy inspires students. Hickey (1991) and Hayes (2002) agreed that children gain an enhanced understanding of themselves and a greater sense of community. According to Olson and Gee (1989), students learned to identify with their communities and to better understand community values. Perhaps Smith (1998) was correct when she said that genealogy “can change lives” (p. 39).

The study of family and oral history strengthens both family bonds and inter-generational relationships (Burroughs, 2001; Carter, 1995; Davis, 2003; Hayes, 2002; Hickey, 1999; McCachern, 1999; Olmedo, 1997; Olson & Gee, 1989). Burroughs stated that in giving children a personal heritage, we are not only helping them to understand the world, but also to gain “respect for elders, bridge generation gaps, and heal family wounds” (p. 36). Students begin to identify with past generations and to “feel a growing sense of responsibility toward older people” (Davis, 2003, p. 15). Olmedo (1997) agreed that genealogy “promotes dialogue across the generations” (p. 54). Olson and Gee (1989) cited an older study by Wigginton (1975) who found that older people gain a sense of importance when interviewed for family and local history projects (p. 79).
McCachern (1999) noted renewed relationships with relatives who families never knew. In addition, there are bridges built between home and school (Olmedo, 1997) mostly because parents become involved (Carter, 1995). Since the research helped the students to build a sense of continuity and stability (Barton & Levstik, 2004), it seems family history would be especially valuable for students whose home lives have been in flux.

Barton and Levstik (2004) summed up the affective benefits of studying family history in the following:

Gerda Lerner claims that history offers a “sense of perspective about our own lives and encourages us to transcend the finite span of one lifetime by identifying with the generations that came before us and measuring our own actions against the generations that will follow.” One way of achieving this transcendence is through family history, which remains a powerful source of identification for many people throughout their lives. (p. 47)

**Reasons for Studying Family History**

I have noted many articles that claimed profound positive outcomes for students of family history. In order to understand why family history has such powerful results for students, perhaps it is helpful to look at the reasons that people like to engage in genealogy. The act of conducting research about one’s own family is at least as old as recorded history. The Egyptian pharaohs carved their family trees in stone as early as 1250 B.C. (Burroughs, 2001). Over 3,000 years later, genealogy is considered the most popular indoor hobby in America (Aaron, 1992).
So, why is genealogy so popular? The literature offers many theories to answer this question. We are motivated to learn about something when we already know something about it (Hickey, 1999) and when we have a personal connection to the subject matter (Dublin, 1997). Hickey explained, “Starting with what is familiar to them ensures their psychological and intellectual involvement in the new topic” (p. 2). Barton and Levstik (2004) quoted Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), “Almost every American deeply engages the past, and the past that engages them most deeply is that of their family” (p. 47). There is a strong, natural curiosity that is piqued when we learn about our own families (Aaron, 1992; Hickey, 1999). When studying genealogy, “The mood is of interest and joy” (Davis, 2003, p. 16). “Unexpected, unsought discoveries that occur during the investigative process give an added reward” (Olson & Gee, 1989, p. 31). Our sense of history is a connection to the world and helps us to overcome the feeling of isolation (Cooper, 1996; Davis, 2003).

Perhaps we study genealogy not only for ourselves, but for the greater good as well. “Family history can lend dignity and purpose to people who see themselves as marginalized or unmoored” (Laichas, 2005, ¶17). Laichas wrote that genealogy can help to invert the current social and political order and offered an example. He cited the discovery that Sally Hemmings did indeed have children with Thomas Jefferson. He claimed that the debate was about more than Hemmings’ descendants wanting access to Monticello cemetery, and that it was really an “effort to open up the whole of U.S. History, rewrite the memorials, and rename the dead” (¶47). Olmedo (1997) brought this idea one step further when he mentioned the suggestion of Sitton, Mehaffy, and Davis
(1983) that we should rewrite history upwards from the organizational units of families and local communities. Family history can stretch beyond the personal.

**Constraints**

Through the lens of literature, the benefits of family history have been explored. So, are there any reasons not to use family history in the classroom? There must be some reason that family history has been marginal, at best, in the social studies curriculum. According to Laichas (2005), genealogy traditionally has been seen as elitist and sentimental. He also cited problems with sources pointing to the fact that most students cannot search very far back and few ever reach back into the 19th century. He warned that we must also be careful of emotional enmeshment, but he said that these constraints should not stop teachers from using genealogy with students.

Parker (1990) noted problems that may be encountered by librarians when students engage in family and local history. She warned that libraries do not always have the appropriate materials or enough media devices such as microfilm readers. She suggested teachers let librarians know about the specifics of the projects ahead of time and cited an example of a successful project in the New Jersey Public Libraries.

Perhaps the greatest concern of teachers regarding family history projects is the diversity in family configurations (Davis, 2003; Humes, 1994; Pederson, 1998). Teachers worry that adopted students might feel uncomfortable or that parents will be upset with the intrusion of privacy. None of the literature suggested avoiding family history in the classroom because of constraints, but instead offered ways to deal with some of these problems. Humes (1994) suggested allowing the students’ comfort levels...
to dictate the project. Pederson (1998) encouraged teachers to be sensitive to the
diversity of family situations and to design the project accordingly. Davis (2003)
suggested that students research a prominent figure instead of their own history if a
parent is uncomfortable with the project. Most teachers and researchers simply advised
to let the students define who their family members are (Czartoski & Hickey, 1997;
Gillis, 2001). Interestingly, Kennedy (1995) argued that family history projects are ideal
for adopted students because they have more options for their research. Genealogy is
actually more beneficial to nontraditional families, according to Hayes (2002). In any
case, the benefits seem to outweigh the constraints in family history research in the
available literature.

Critique of the Family History Literature

After reviewing the many available articles about the use of family history, I am
struck by the lack of empirical research, either qualitative or quantitative. Aside from a
single study (Hayes, 2002) and a mention of family history in the results of a survey
(Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998), no researchers provided any data to support their claims.
Anecdotal stories abounded, which can certainly be valuable for other teachers to read,
but with no systematic review of data, I hesitate to call this research. Levstik and Barton
(2001) provided a strong theoretical basis for conducting genealogical research in the
classroom but did not cite any studies that actually examined students’ experiences
through action research or any other systematic method. Their claims sound quite valid,
but they either cite other theoreticians or anecdotal stories that have been published. The
authors seem to cite one another in a circular pattern without encountering solid
qualitative or quantitative data. Sleeter (2008) also provided a solid theoretical basis on which to build family history projects, however her work was limited to White students at the university level.

Furthermore, the single example of sound research that I mentioned, the dissertation written by Hayes (2002), lacked an important piece. In his analysis of the 80 interviews he conducted with students, teachers, and administrators following a high school family history project, Hayes claimed that high school is the best place to use and study family history. After reviewing the literature, he said that by third grade, students are capable of only understanding their immediate family and he was concerned about children realizing their family may not be biological at that age. By sixth grade, he claimed that students are able to study their grandparents but no other generations. He posited that by eighth grade, students are able to understand three generations back. I think he significantly underestimated children’s cognitive abilities. I have seen preschoolers create and explain family trees of three generations and have seen middle school students’ research back to the 17th century in their families (Knapp, 2011). I have read countless stories from teachers about using these kinds of projects in elementary schools. I tend to agree with Levstik and Barton (2001) on this issue when they claimed that we must define historical thinking in terms of a Vygotskyan (1978) notion of mediated action. Knowing is something one does rather than a neurological state that unfolds. Children are often capable of a great deal when they actually interact with history. Although I respect the work of Hayes (2002), I do think elementary and middle school students are much more capable than has previously been believed.
Connecting the Literature to My Research

In the body of family history research at large, I see two distinct gaps in the literature. The first is the lack of any systematic studies of children using family history. The second is the missing connection between family history and unofficial history. These gaps led me to ask the question, “How do students experience official and unofficial versions of history as they study family history?” My study included a systematic investigation of students engaging in family history while observing the interactions of official and unofficial history.

Family history may be a way to address the problems in social studies classrooms. When teaching history, even when a teacher emphasizes multiculturalism, voices are inevitably left out. Well-intentioned efforts lead to stereotyping and exclusion in many cases. Stanley (2002) suggested that teachers could enable students to explore their own pasts and construct their own narratives and then compare those narratives with other students’ narratives. This sounds like the petits recits (Lyotard, 1979) of which Wertsch (1998) spoke. Small narratives woven together may create an effective unofficial version of history that students find credible and accurate. In so doing, teachers can let students choose which knowledge they study.

Furthermore, students can ask profound questions of the grand narrative like, “Whose knowledge is this?” as Apple (2000) suggested, rather than trying to get students to learn pre-selected knowledge. “By ceasing to be ‘tourists,’ ‘visitors,’ or ‘spectators,’ and instead becoming authors of our own post-memory, we can begin raising questions about our agency and subjectivity” (Gounari, 2007, p. 112). Students can engage in more
than sentimentalism; they can critically examine profound issues of race and power.

When personal and professional interests led Sleeter (2008) to research her own family history, she found that the self-exdration process in family history was important for students.

This process can work as an entrée into historical memory about race, ethnicity, and identity—revealing the ways in which power and privilege have been constructed, the prices people have paid for that, and the ways in which ordinary people have changed inequities. (p. 115)

I entered into this research knowing full well that this is likely not a popular movement in which I find myself. When there are attempts to change official history, the state becomes nervous and often attacks. VanSledright (2010) described what happened when the 1994 U.S. History National Standards attempted to be more inclusive. In 1995, the U.S. Senate actually passed a resolution denouncing the Standards because they violated the “American Creed” and were found to be “sullying the arc of the nation-state narrative with too many examples drawn from the seamier underbelly of the American past” (VanSledright, 2010, p. 22). Those in power have a great stake in maintaining the status quo (Apple, 2000). Thus, they generally do not favor changes in the social studies curriculum.

While this battle is being waged federally, I can bring my research to local classrooms. I hope my research that describes local contexts reaches a broader public and helps to change history education in this country. The grand narrative that has become the official history of the U.S. is a problematic and exclusionary story. If we can
weave student voices into the tapestry of the story of the United States, perhaps there is a
chance of true multivoicedness and a richer, more complete picture of the history of this
country.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 1, I defined the problem of disengaged students who sit passively in social studies classes hearing an official version of history that excludes many of them. I explained that the purpose of my study was to examine the beliefs of the students in regards to this official version of history and to explore their experiences with unofficial history through genealogy.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the existing literature about official and unofficial versions of history as well as the use of family history in the social studies classroom. I identified the gaps in the literature and explained the central question in my study was designed to address those needs. The central research question, “How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history?” was presented along with four subsidiary questions including:

1. What do students believe about official and unofficial history?
2. What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?
3. What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented by their teachers and textbooks?
4. How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?

In this chapter, I describe my theoretical framework including my epistemology along with an explanation of the design for my study and an explanation of how the
design is most appropriate for my research questions. I discuss the criteria used for both site and participant selection and my methods of data collection and analysis. Finally, I describe issues of trustworthiness, my subjective role as a researcher, and limitations for the study.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Epistemology**

I believe that subjectivity is unavoidable in research (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, I explain my theoretical assumptions in order to be as transparent as possible about my subjectivities. I resonate with a Deweyan experimental pragmatism (1930/1983) whereby truth is not universal and only tentative claims can ever be made. No objective truth exists. I agree with Greene (1992) who claimed that there is no reality for which to search. The closest one can come to truth is mediated experience in specific contexts. “‘Reality’—if it means anything—means interpreted experience” (Greene, 1992, p. 203). The more angles from which we can view life, the fuller the picture is. “An object—a classroom, a neighborhood street, a field of flowers—shows itself differently when encountered by a variety of spectators. The reality of that object . . . arises out of the sum total of its appearances” (Greene, 1993, p. 13). This notion of engaging many perspectives, which are individually subjective interpretations, helps me to explain how I see knowledge and truth. My research is about engaging as many views of a situation, person, or process that I can in order to come to tentative conclusions. I know I cannot find any Truth that will speak for all, so I do not even seek that.
My goal as a researcher, then, is a critical awareness rather than a definitive answer. As Schram (2006) noted, it is desirable to know your direction but not your destination. Research becomes about “turning familiar facts and understandings into puzzles” (p. 7). This belief manifested in the way I used open-ended questions with students as well as open-coding during analysis. Using participants’ emic perspectives for category titles is another way I maintained the nuance of their beliefs rather than trying to fit their beliefs into my preconceived notions. However, since no objectivity exists, researchers must not only acknowledge their own subjectivity, but must also systematically seek out and articulate their subjectivities throughout the research process (Peshkin, 1988). I built systematic subjectivity-seeking into my data collection methods and continued the process during analysis through regular personal reflection and memo writing. This topic is discussed in more detail in the trustworthiness section.

I believe that knowledge is context-bound. As Graue and Walsh (1998) claimed, “What we know is inextricably bound to when and where we know it” (p. 38). I believe there are some commonalities, though, in human perception. In Graue and Walsh’s (1998) words, “Our conceptions of ‘what is’ hold us together and provide us the concurrence we need to interact, to make decisions, and to judge the adequacy of our actions and those of others” (p. 38). However, this “what is” is fragile, contextual, and constantly changing so it cannot be called “truth.”

In light of these beliefs, I view myself with one foot in interpretivism and one foot in critical research. I discuss why I resonate with both traditions and how I resolve the
tensions between them. Since these lenses are more than a method, as they shape the questions I ask and the data I perceive, I call them “stances.”

**Interpretivist Stance**

I find myself engaging in qualitative research partly because of my world view and partly because of the questions in which I am interested. Interpretivist researchers believe that human behavior cannot be viewed as based on universal laws, so everything revolves around the idea of meaning-making (Erickson, 1986). I am interested in how my students make meaning of history in the context of their classrooms. I believe in a broad methodology where local contexts along with the larger societal and political contexts should be examined. By context, I mean “a culturally and historically situated place and time, a specific here and now” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 9). Therefore, local interpretations are framed by the larger picture in which the research is embedded.

**Critical Stance**

My view of critical research can be considered an epistemological standpoint (Niesz, Koch, & Rumrill, 2008) or an educational ideology (Eisner, 2002). I agree with the major tenets of the critical approach including the beliefs that knowledge is socially situated, that knowing must begin with traditionally excluded groups, and that dominant knowledge should be critiqued (Schwandt, 2001). To me, these are honest motivations for research and are part of what Graue and Walsh (1998) called “finding it out.” “Finding it out tends to challenge what a culture knows as well as what it wants to know” (p. xvi). So, my critical stance involves “the positioning of the inquiry and the inquirer
amidst contradictory and complicated issues of power, ownership of knowledge, and political and economic contexts” (Schram, 2006, p. 3).

A Critical Interpretivist

Although tensions exist between interpretivism and critical research, this is the place of intersection: how people make meaning is relative to how they are positioned (Niesz et al., 2008). This type of interpretivism is “complex, confusing, and completely resistant to recipe” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 191). In some sense, one must “make the road by walking” (Freire & Horton, 1990). I am aware of the complexity inherent in this type of research and embrace the desire for nuance. In Schram’s (2006) words, “Qualitative researchers seek to make phenomena more complex, not simpler” (p. 9).

Some would argue that there are too many tensions between interpretivism and critical research to lay claim to both, but they share many assumptions: social reality is pluralist; power plays a role in human subjectivity and discouraging agency; culture and language must be analyzed; and knowledge gets defined and changed in complicated processes (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). I agree that many assumptions are shared, and I lean on the traditions of both interpretivism and critical research. Knowledge changes over time and we, as researchers, can play a role in guiding those changes toward empowerment for traditionally excluded groups. Therefore, I approached this study as a critical interpretivist.
Methods

Case Study

Is a case study determined by that which is studied? Is case study a particular strategy of inquiry? Is it a methodology? Or is a case study an overarching research strategy? There are many dissenting opinions among well-respected researchers concerning the definition of case study. Creswell (2007) articulated this dissonance and claimed that approach may be the best descriptor for case study, although Stake (2005) asserted that a case simply refers to the subject of study. I tend to agree with Creswell and would add that the approach encompasses a certain stance and epistemological grounding. A concise and useful definition comes from Creswell (2007):

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

For the purposes of this study, I define a case study as an approach as Creswell (2007) described.

Rationale for Case Study

I examined the progression in thinking of several purposefully selected students in a specific classroom, and therefore, I chose to conduct a collective case study. Each student was considered a case. “A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 444). I see the process of
studying each student and the write-up that has come out of the investigation as parts of the case study.

A collective case study is an instrumental study extended to several cases (Stake, 2005). Since I focused upon one main concern, students’ experiences with official and unofficial history, and I listened to multiple students in order to illustrate that issue, a collective case study was the fit best (Creswell, 2007). I purposefully selected multiple cases to investigate different perspectives on the single issue—which is what collective case studies do best (Yin, 2003).

Barton (2008) sounded a call for research that examines the process of learning historical thinking, rather than just a moment or two in time. Because it was a case study, I conducted my research over an academic quarter and spent a significant amount of time with the students so that I could view the process of change over time. McNiff (2002) explained that research should be used to show the process of learning that informs activities rather than just the activity itself. My questions and intentions align with McNiff’s focus on process rather than isolated moments in time.

My theoretical stance, research questions, and methods of data collection and analysis align because I focused on students’ engagement in a process, and because I examined issues of power in terms of history and the current political climate.

Setting

The selection of the research site, teacher, and students was purposeful (Merriam, 1998). I wanted to select a group of students that would provide the best representation
of data to answer my particular research questions. I describe the criteria for the selections along with my rationale in the following sections.

**School Background**

I chose Carroll Academy (pseudonym) for the setting of my study because it fit the criteria I desired. I wanted to find a U.S. History teacher who uses family history with African American students in a public, urban middle school. My own teaching background is in middle school, and I believe this is a ripe time for family history since many students are interested in issues of identity at this stage of development (Powell, 2010). I selected an eighth grade room specifically since the state standards in Ohio call for U.S. History that is aligned to the typical grand narrative described in my literature review. I wanted to work with minority students in poverty since their voices were the most likely to be left out of the narrative. Since using family history in the classroom is not particularly common (Barton & Levstik, 2004), I was fortunate to find Mrs. Swanson (pseudonym) who was teaching a family history project in her classroom for the first time. Mrs. Swanson was a co-student in some of my graduate classes many years ago and had always been interested in my experiences of studying family history with my students. Since she was aware of my desire to engage in research, she offered her classroom as a site when she decided to try a family history project with her students.

Carroll Academy has an interesting history. The building in which Carroll Academy is housed was built in 1929 as a Catholic boys’ school. It is rented by the management company that currently runs the school. At the end of the school year previous to my study, the government shut down the school that was part of the large
metropolitan school district due to the students’ failing test scores. A private management company was hired to “fix” the school. They fired the entire administration and all but three of the teachers. They then hired a new staff, wrote a charter that said the classes will be project-based, and renamed it “Carroll Academy” (TI1, April 18, 2012). The student body remained consistent throughout all of the changes. The physical building was not improved and remains in a rather run-down condition with ceiling tiles falling and exposed pipes in the walls. When I began the study in April of 2012, I noticed a rotting red M&M candy on the floor of the girls’ bathroom. When I ended the study at the end of the school year, the M&M was still there. Needless to say, the building is not well maintained.

Carroll Academy educates almost 500 students from grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Most of the students entered in kindergarten. The building in which I conducted my research is considered the middle school and is comprised of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. The student body is identified as 99% African American, and 97% of the students live in poverty. Since it is a charter school, students must be accepted through a lottery system and then reenroll each year (TI1, April 18, 2012).

The Academy is located in a large, metropolitan city in Ohio. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the city has a population of almost 400,000 and is relatively diverse. Fifty-four percent of the city is African American; 34% is White; and 10% is Hispanic. The diversity is not reflected in the neighborhoods which have a history of homogeneous racial and ethnic groupings. The average home in the city is worth $84,000 and currently

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3 Table 3 on page 73 lists my abbreviations for the different forms of data collection.
has one of the highest poverty rates among large cities in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

**Classroom Background**

The particular classroom in which I conducted my research was an eighth grade U.S. History class. Twenty-four students started the school year with Mrs. Swanson. She reported that the children behaved wildly and blamed the prior administration who did not seem to focus on student behavior. She explained that the "biggest behavior problems were slowly eliminated" by the new administration during the first half of the school year through expulsions or strongly encouraged withdrawals. By the time of the study, five of the students left, so the class consisted of 19 children when I met them in April (TII, April 18, 2012).

**Teacher Background**

The teacher in my study, Mrs. Swanson, is a White middle-class woman in her late 30s. She seems to have a positive rapport with the students and she clearly enjoys talking about history with them (FN, April 17, 2012). Mrs. Swanson had eight years of teaching experience at the time of the study but was new to Carroll Academy. She completed her Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Social Studies Education in 2008. Since a description of the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom is necessary for the understanding of the context for the cases, an explanation of the methods of instruction and historical sources used in the classroom follows.
Mrs. Swanson reported that her traditional teaching methods and materials do not always align with her more progressive beliefs about the teaching and learning of social studies. She said that the students “hate” social studies and that she “hates” their 14-year-old textbook (TI1, April 18, 2012). She claimed that their textbook has a pronounced right-wing bias so she often photocopied pages for the students from a text used by the neighboring school systems instead. She described her methods of instruction and her students in the following excerpt:

I hate to say it; I do a lot with notes with these kids. And I— it’s not that I—I guess, I get very frustrated because a lot of these kids have been drilled and killed so much with testing. They do not like to think; they are scared to think on their own. They have problems expressing their own opinions. They do have a problem when it comes to questioning-thinking deeper about things. No one’s ever taught them that it’s just, any higher level of critical thinking skill . . . I want to do so much with primary sources, but again, that’s difficult with these kids who don’t have that critical, analytical thinking. I did find when I did Pre-Revolutionary War, I handed them a transcribed letter by George Washington to his mother. They were so impressed by that. They were so impressed by that and they really enjoyed it and it seemed to stick with them. The problem that I’m having is finding primary sources that are as straightforward as that. That’s the kicker. (TI1, April 18, 2012)

The teacher critiqued her own instructional choices and materials but felt constrained by the inexperience of the students. She went on to describe her methods of instruction:
Well this year, they really wanted us—because I guess the way the Charter for the school is worded—that we’re supposed to do a lot of hands-on project based, you know, station centers. And the problem with that is, it’s not the fact that we weren’t given proper training, I don’t feel the children were given the proper training for it. As a result, when you do sit down to do a true project-based thing, where you just throw a question at a kid, you let them run with it, which is what I tried doing with my first project based learning. You have a lot of problems because those kids are just so used to, you know, the cookie cutter, what do you want? What do you want? What do you want? What do you want? It’s not what I want; it’s what you’re coming up with. Yeah, we’re very much stuck in a—I don’t know it’s hard to describe. They’re so stuck in that bottom level of Bloom. They’re just—they’re trapped there. (TI1, April 18, 2012)

Again, Mrs. Swanson described her frustration with the lack of experience of the students and their lack of critical thinking skills. She wanted to work with primary sources and project-based lessons, but she ran into so many problems with her first project that she was hesitant to proceed with the family history project. Her hope that the project would engage the students overrode her hesitations.

Mrs. Swanson’s goal for the family history project was to connect the children to the curriculum. “I really want them to walk away with a sense of self-history. If they can plug their family into the experience I think they will feel more connected. That’s my ultimate goal” (TI1, April 12, 2012). Since her students’ histories would involve African
American history, I asked her if she had focused upon minority or women’s voices previously during the school year. She replied:

I always feel bad because I always feel like I skip over that. It’s a horrible thing to say because I feel that it’s so important but it always seems to get pushed to the side. It’s always a last minute—you know, ’cause like right now, I have right now until basically May 24th to get through Civil War and Reconstruction. (TI1, April 12, 2012)

She felt constrained by the march through U.S. history from exploration to reconstruction, which she was responsible for teaching, according to the standards. The students were presented the typical content of the grand narrative with common methods of instruction.

Mrs. Swanson wanted to try something new for the end of the school year that would engage the students and be more aligned to the project-based lessons that the school’s Charter described. She designed the family history project. The details of my role in the project and the project itself are described in the researcher’s role section.

**Participants**

Seventeen out of the class of 19 students wanted to take part in the study and received permission from their parents. Out of those 17, five were purposefully selected to serve as individual cases in the study so that I could follow their development closely by interviewing and observing them frequently. I selected the five students only after observing all of the students in class for several days, reading their first questionnaires,
and listening to the teachers’ descriptions of each student in her first interview. The
criteria for participant selection follow.

A qualitative researcher of any type usually prefers a variation in sampling
(Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006), and I had particular reasons for my choice of students. I
wanted a diverse sample of students regarding gender, academic ability, and interests.
The five students I chose had a wide range of grades and abilities as well as differences in
interests and experiences. Because I was most interested in observing how African
American students respond to and resist the grand narrative, which excludes and
marginalizes their ancestors (Epstein, 1998), racial homogeneity was acceptable for me.
Table 1 shows the pseudonyms and demographic descriptions of each participant.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Identified Race</th>
<th>Teacher-Identified Ability</th>
<th>SS Grades for Quarters 1,2,3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>F,F,D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>B,B,A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rihanna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>African Mexican American</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>D,C,C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>D,F,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>B,A,A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I secured permission from the participants, the participants’ parents, the teacher,
and the principal. I obtained the permission forms, explained the study, and answered
questions of all of the parties before the data collection began. (See Appendices A, B, and C for Consent Forms.)

**My Role in the Family Project**

Due to my experience in the area of genealogical research and in teaching family history, I served as an adviser to both the teacher and students in the beginning of the study and periodically throughout the project. I met with the teacher before the project began in order to help her brainstorm lesson ideas. Although she requested that I help her design lessons and create the list of project assignments (Appendix D), she was ultimately responsible for making all the pedagogical and practical decisions regarding the family project. She developed the unit and changed details as the project ensued in order to meet time constraints and students’ requests. I taught the first lesson to the students because Mrs. Swanson wanted me to introduce myself to the kids and provide a context for the project. She taught the rest of the lessons with “guest appearances” from me if a student had a genealogical question she could not answer.

I also served as an advisor to and co-investigator with the students. If they struggled with technological glitches or research road blocks, they asked me for guidance in choosing Internet sites and finding information. As a participant-observer, I took some of the students’ family trees home with me to try to penetrate some of the road blocks. I was able to find some documents for them that provided enough information to help them reach another generation.

Although I struggled with not getting more involved, I wanted to observe as much as I could. The teacher in me wanted to engage in all the lessons, but I forced myself to
listen, watch, and record as much as possible. When a student confronted a research
block with which they knew I could likely help them, I did not feel it was ethical to deny
them assistance. Therefore, I helped them with the actual genealogical searches. I wrote
several analytic memos about my struggle between being a participant and an observer.
(See Appendix E for an excerpt of a memo.) This struggle is discussed more in the
trustworthiness section.

Description of the Family Project

Mrs. Swanson generally taught the students from the traditional curriculum with
lecture, notes, and textbooks on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. She started the unit
with the causes of the Civil War and ended at the beginning of Reconstruction. On
Wednesdays and Fridays, she conducted the family history project. A detailed calendar
of the actual topics and lessons she taught can be found in Appendix F.

Her family history lessons consisted of three different types of experiences: whole
group teacher-directed instruction, small group student-led activities, and individual
research and conference sessions. The whole group lessons included the following
topics: genealogical vocabulary, pedigree charts, creating and conducting oral histories,
using genealogical websites, analyzing photographs, census records, military documents,
and life event records, and exploring issues in African American genealogy. The small
group activities included document and text analysis and the sharing of oral histories. In
individual work sessions, the students used the computers for research, discussed their
progress with Mrs. Swanson, and worked on a variety of assignments based on their
research. (Again, see Appendix D for the Checklist for Final Project.)
Data Collection

Although I use the common term of data “collection,” I want to express my awareness that a more precise term might be data “generation.” Graue and Walsh (1998) explained that the process of gathering data is “active, creative, and improvisational” (p. 91). A researcher does not just collect neutral information; he or she designs tasks and chooses specific information for specific purposes. I remain with the more traditional term of collection for the sake of familiarity, but I recognize my role in generating data.

While I was designing the study, I reflected upon what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested as considerations when choosing data collection methods. They encouraged readers to choose techniques that are likely to “1) elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, 2) contribute different perspectives on the issue, and 3) make effective use of time available for data collection” (p. 24). The diverse methods were chosen in order to elicit a wide variety of data from multiple perspectives. Those methods included: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, (c) observations, (d) artifact collection, and (e) journals. Since I collected many different types of data, I created a data log for organizational purposes. (See Appendix G.) Using observations, interviews, and artifacts within a case study “allows for holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 102). These multiple forms of data collection allowed me to closely observe the students interact with official and unofficial history.

Interviews

Interviews in the context of qualitative research are defined as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion”
(Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). I chose interviewing as my central method of collecting data because it allowed me to investigate the thoughts and feelings of the participants that were not easily observable. Interviews are particularly suited to case studies because they allow researchers to “find out what happened, why, and what it means more broadly” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 6). The interviews allowed my participants to voice their inner thoughts in a comfortable and respectful setting. The conversational model (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) worked well because give and take occurred while still allowing me, as the researcher, to gently guide the focus of the conversation and stay on the topics of concern to my research.

I chose to use multiple semi-structured interviews with mostly open-ended questions throughout the study. The questions were open-ended because this style preserved the holism and context necessary for examining both the local and wider contextual factors (Niesz, 2006). Although researchers cannot escape bringing some assumptions to the research, Niesz et al. (2008) claimed that open-ended structures limit the influence that researchers’ assumptions can have during interviews and other tasks where participants’ views are central. I used multiple interviewing of the same participants spaced out evenly through the study because I wanted to observe the process through “separate but overlapping angles” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). Multiple semi-structured interviews can prevent researchers from leaping to unfounded conclusions and allow for more nuanced analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Teacher interviews.** I interviewed the teacher at the beginning of the project to learn about the background of the school, the classroom, the first three quarters of the
school year, and to get a sense of her ideas about teaching and her students. I prepared a list of questions but used many probes and follow-ups to elicit the richest data possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This interview lasted for 40 minutes. I interviewed her again for 30 minutes at the end of the project to ask about the experiences she had and her observations of her students.

**Student interviews.** I interviewed each of my participants three times. The first interviews were the longest and lasted between 15 and 40 minutes, depending on the length of answers from particular students. Some wanted to engage in lengthy conversations. Although I used a similar structure for each participant, the questions were slightly different based upon their responses to the questionnaires (which I will describe in the next section.) Rubin and Rubin (2005) said, “Each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share” (p. 4). The second and third rounds of interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes each. In Table 2, I present the timeline of the interviews in relation to the questionnaires (which will be described in the next section) to show how they informed one another.

I used some practical tips for interviewing children offered by Graue and Walsh (1998) as well. Asking hypothetical and third-person questions were two ways I elicited data from the children. I also used interviewing tasks including: reading excerpts from the text with commentary from students, viewing a photo that students described, and a Source Sort Activity. This allowed me to listen to the students’ thinking while they were engaged in a task.
Table 2

*Timeline of Interviews and Questionnaires*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>First week of study: Written questionnaire for whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Second week: Semi-structured interviews for five students (15–40 minutes each); with follow-up questions specific to each child based upon their answers to the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fourth week: Short questionnaire for whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Fourth week: Second level interview (10-15 minutes) for five participants with Source Sort Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sixth week: Final Questionnaire for whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Sixth–Seventh weeks: Third level interview (15-30 minutes) for five participants; similar structure but individualized questions for each child based upon their answers to second interview and second questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I created the Source Sort Activity so the students could rank types of historical sources from most to least credible while describing their reasoning. As Bernard (2006) stated, “Rating scales are powerful data generators” (p. 317). I saw the benefit of creating this task, which could be considered a structured piece of an interview (Bernard, 2006) nested within a semi-structured conversational interview. I listed each of the sources that the students mentioned in the first round of interviews on index cards, and as part of the second interviews, I asked each of them to place the cards in order from most to least credible. In the next chapter, when I refer to the Source Sort Activity, I include a figure that shows the order in which each student placed the cards. I also assigned one point for the lowest ranked source up to six points for the highest ranked source and
added the points together to make sense of the data for the group as a whole. The collective results are described in Chapter 4.

I audio recorded all of the interviews. During the interviews, I took notes to help me immediately formulate probes and follow-up questions. I also used the notes to triangulate the data with the audio recordings in case there were problems with the sound. I kept an audio log of dates, time stamps, and participants’ names in order to ensure a detailed record. At the end of the study, the audio recordings were transcribed. I listened to each interview while reading the completed transcription to assure the accuracy of the initial transcriptions. I made changes to the transcriptions at that point to create the most accurate representation of what the participants actually said.

Questionnaires

The entire class was given three written questionnaires to complete in the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Each questionnaire contained several open-ended questions. (See Appendix H for a Questionnaire Example.) The questions in the first and last questionnaires were similar so I could highlight the changes in each student’s responses. I chose to use questionnaires for three reasons. First, I was able to give the questionnaires to the whole class. Due to time limitations, I could not interview all members of the class individually. The questionnaire allowed me to “hear” all of the students’ voices and provided a context for the study. Secondly, the answers to the first questionnaire helped me to choose the five students for the cases. I looked for a variation in demographics and opinions so I could attain a diverse sample. Finally, the answers to the questionnaires were used to help me tailor the interview questions to individual
students. This allowed me time to consider the students’ responses and to prepare clarifying questions during the interviews. The students’ written answers to the questions were brief so they would not have sufficed on their own, but they were helpful in priming the pump of inquiry for the interviews. Bernard (2006) claimed that questionnaires can actually be considered structured interviews in qualitative research. The questionnaires and interviews served as complementary methods of data collection in my study.

Observations

I engaged in participant observation throughout the study (Bernard, 2006). I was involved with the students to the extent of building rapport, getting to know the setting, and helping them with online research; however this role was subordinate to my role as a researcher (Merriam, 1998). My field notes taken during observations allowed me to attain a “firsthand account of the situation under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 102). I observed the students in individual work time, small group work time, and whole class lessons in their classrooms two to three times per week for an hour at a time throughout the academic quarter. Due to scheduling conflicts including Spring break, state testing, and celebrations during the end of the school year, I engaged in a total of 16 observations. My purpose for the observations was to watch the students interact in their natural setting in firsthand experiences (Merriam, 1998). I audio recorded the small group work involving the five participants, but could not audio record the whole class lessons since two of the students did not sign consent forms. The teacher filled me in on the whole group lessons when I was not there through the use of her journal.
The observations that I recorded took three different forms, jottings, field notes, and a log, which all resided in my research binder. The jottings, field notes, and log were effective ways for me to document my firsthand observations on a daily basis. Although interviews were important ways to hear the students’ accounts of their experiences, the observations served as a firsthand account of the students’ experiences from my perspective.

**Jottings.** Jottings are quick notes one writes down during or right after observations, which are used to jog the memory for later writing and analysis (Bernard, 2006). I created jottings during all phases of the research. I turned the jottings into field notes each day before I left the research site by expanding on the comments and providing a context for what was happening in the classroom. These jottings became my descriptive field notes.

**Field notes.** Bernard (2006) claimed that there are three kinds of field notes to consider: methodological, descriptive, and analytic. I used all three at different times. Methodological notes dealt with the techniques and slight changes I made from the original proposal. Bernard said the rationale for the changes should be included in notes and can become material for a publication about one’s methodology at some point. The descriptive notes are the “meat and potatoes of fieldwork” (Bernard, 2006, p. 397). They are the detailed descriptions of what one sees and hears while at the site. Any observations are fair material for descriptive field notes. Each evening after an observation, I turned the written field notes into typed notes where I added information I recalled and organized the data into a useful form. The third kind of field notes is the
analytic memo. McNiff (2002) said that these memos are a place to focus on what the researcher is thinking and doing and should remind the researcher, “I am at the center of the enquiry” (p. 89). This was an important piece for me. My attitudes, beliefs, and experiences were documented. Herr and Anderson (2005) said that analytic memos are the place to keep record of how one’s changing roles, actions, and decisions manifest. They said that a researcher must note the choices they make and the consequences those choices have on one’s self and others as a matter of ethics. I found analytic memo writing helpful in my research and was vigilant about recording and analyzing my experiences as they happened. An example excerpt from one of my memos where I discuss the tension between my role as participant and observer can be found in Appendix E. This tension is discussed in the trustworthiness section.

**Log.** The research log is a place to create a running account of how researchers plan to spend their time as well as how they actually spend their time at the research site (Bernard, 2006). I recorded the date, time, and location of each day’s visit along with a summary of what happened in case I missed something in the field notes. I wrote down the order of events, the topics discussed, the activities in which I participated, and the names of the students with whom I spoke. The structure I used for the log provided a reference for my field notes each day and later served to be valuable when I created the calendar of the teachers’ lesson topics.

**Artifact Collection**

Aside from interviews and observations, artifact collection served as another important form of data in my study. The analysis of physical traces can provide great
insight for a researcher (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). Unlike observations and interviews, artifacts are usually produced for reasons other than the study. Merriam (1998) described the benefit of using artifacts: “They are in fact a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 104). I collected student work samples including their final family history projects, their families’ genealogical sources, the teachers’ lesson plans, the teacher’s grade book, and tests given to the students.

**Teacher/Student Journals**

My final method was the collection of teacher and student-written journals. I asked the teacher and students to keep notes of their own thoughts and experiences during the research study. The authors determined the design, frequency, and quality of the journals. I wrote some questions in the inside cover of the log and told them they could use these as prompts if they did not know what to write. Some example questions include: “Have you encountered any surprises in your research if any?” “Does anything you found in your research remind you of something you’ve learned in social studies?” For the teacher, I asked, “Have the students mentioned their family history research during regular history lessons? What connections have they made to American history?” The journal served to be a rich source of data for the teacher because she wrote down her thoughts at times when I was not scheduled to observe and right after important events occurred. Although I am most interested in the students’ experiences, the observations of the teacher, who is very familiar with the official history curriculum, provided another perspective for me. Although all of the students reported writing in their journals at some
point, only two of them actually turned in journals at the end of the project and they both provided limited data. The students seemed much more interested in talking about their experiences than in writing them down.

I collected data in the form of semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, observations with field notes, artifacts, and journals. Collecting multiple forms of data provided me with material for the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) for which I was looking.

Data Analysis

I approached the data analysis process inductively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as an interpretivist researcher. Since my gaze was focused upon the students making sense of their own experiences (Erickson, 1986), I tried to allow concepts and themes to emerge rather than trying to fit the data into some preconceived structure. I realize that I cannot escape playing a role in the emergence of concepts and themes, though, in my honest effort to make sense of the data (Erickson, 2004). In other words, as Graue and Walsh (1998) wrote, “Theory does not leap out of one’s data record” (p. 28). I acted upon the data, but tried to keep the process as inductive as possible. The only semblance of structure that I brought to the analysis was the conception of history as either official or unofficial. When I read through the data, I noticed this dichotomy of which the students spoke. During the second half of the study, they actually used the words official and unofficial history. When coding, I kept this structure in mind as it was essential to my research questions and it seemed to be part of the way students thought about history.
The analysis began during the collection process (Niesz et al., 2008). For instance, I read the questionnaires in order to prepare for the interviews. In this act, I was immediately analyzing the data I saw in the questionnaires. I considered the students’ responses in light of my research questions and developed individualized follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) that were intended to illicit more information about those particular issues. When I created follow-up questions and probes during the actual interviews, I also tried to make sense of the responses in that moment. Separating data collection from data analysis in this work is somewhat inauthentic. For the purposes of writing, though, I have conceived of the analysis process in three stages: preparing and organizing the data, coding the data, and representing the data (Creswell, 2007).

Preparing and Organizing Data

Since I collected a large amount of data, it was critical for me to keep the data organized. I photocopied the students’ work and logs as well as the teacher’s records. I wrote summary notes to indicate exactly when and how the data were collected. I kept a log of how I actually spent all my time in the school. The field note sheets I used included a column for notes and a column for reflections on the notes so that immediate impressions could be recorded. Each piece of audio data was logged on a spreadsheet which indicated who was speaking, the times and dates, and any pertinent setting information. These organizational strategies were necessary to maintain the integrity of the data. When citing individual sources of data in this study, I use the abbreviations in Table 3.
Table 3

_Data Abbreviation Chart_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Name of Data Source</th>
<th>Date of Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>Student Interview #1</td>
<td>First 2 weeks with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>Student Interview #2</td>
<td>Middle of study; week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>Student Interview #3</td>
<td>Last two weeks with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI1</td>
<td>Teacher Interview #1</td>
<td>April 20, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI2</td>
<td>Teacher Interview #2</td>
<td>June 12, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Student Questionnaire #1</td>
<td>April 20, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Student Questionnaire #2</td>
<td>May 11, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Student Questionnaire #3</td>
<td>June 1, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Researcher’s Field Notes</td>
<td>Varies; recorded each day of project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TJ</td>
<td>Teacher’s Research Journal/Log</td>
<td>Varies 4/17/12–6/11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Student Log</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact, Work Sample</td>
<td>Sample of students’ work</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact, Final Project</td>
<td>Final Family History Project turned in by students</td>
<td>May 29, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact, Grade Book</td>
<td>Teacher’s records for academic year</td>
<td>May 29, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I photocopied all of the pieces of data and organized them into five color-coded containers representing each of the five students. I created an organizational summary chart for each student to keep track of which documents were present and where they were mentioned in field notes and journals. (See Appendix I.) Organizing the data in
this way allowed me to view each student as a separate case first before I read across the cases.

**Coding Data**

In order to code the data, I followed suggestions made by Rubin and Rubin (2005) including (a) Recognition of concepts, themes, events, and topical markers; (b) Clarification and synthesis of concepts and themes; (c) Generation of codes; (d) Sorting and grouping, and (e) Synthesis, checking, and modification of findings. These steps were not sequential, but instead involved an overlapping of stages throughout the collection and analysis processes.

I first read all the data to achieve a holistic picture. Upon the second reading, I began a “conversation” with the data (Merriam, 1998, p. 181) by writing reactions, questions, and comments in the margins. When I read the notes in the margins, I began to recognize concepts and topical markers such as “role of the teacher,” “family stories,” and “contradicting versions.” I placed temporary labels on topics that I saw emerging. I then systematically looked through each interview and other sources in an effort to clarify the concepts and synthesize each student’s ideas. As I continued across different forms of data, these categories became more precise. If a category did not relate to my research questions, I eliminated it.

Eight categories were refined enough to serve as codes for the way students spoke about official and unofficial versions of history and the interactions between the two. A coding structure began to emerge as I linked the ideas to either official or unofficial history. For example, the code, “mistrust of official history,” was closely related to
“perceived motivations of textbook authors” but separate enough to be viewed as two distinct codes. To illustrate these two codes, I use two quotes from Jasmine. She said, “Social studies is confusing because it’s hard to believe some stuff that’s in it” (I1, April 27, 2012). That statement was coded as “mistrust of official history.” In a later interview, she said, “You tell a story but you leave a part out so you wouldn’t look bad” (I3, May 23, 2012). I coded that statement as “perceived motivations of textbook authors.” These issues are related, but they fit into two different categories. What I learned from the two codes together provided a working response for the first research question. Another instance of the coding structure can be found in the codes, “preference for unofficial history” and “family as source of unofficial history.” These codes fit together to address the second research question. The structure served to organize findings per research question.

After creating codes, I sorted the data into spreadsheets that housed quotes and examples from interviews, questionnaires, and student work samples that pertained to each particular code. I noted the name of the participant, the source and date of each piece of data, along with the quote that related to each code. For an example of one of the spreadsheets, see Appendix J, which shows every time a student brought up a contradiction between the versions of history they heard at home with the ones they heard at school. The bold print indicates quotes that spoke directly to the issue at hand.

Due to the way I organized the spreadsheets, with the grouping of each participant’s ideas about the issues described in the code, I was able to use the documents for both the within-case and cross-case analyses. I added an additional step to the cross-
case section, though. I summarized responses to the questionnaires by grouping all students’ replies to one particular question together. Trends were more easily seen when data was sorted in this way. An example of the summary sheet is included in Appendix K. I noted changes in the students’ responses from the first questionnaire to the final questionnaire with arrows. The spreadsheets served a useful way to group quotes per student and per code.

As a final step in the coding, I checked back through all of the sources for discrepant data. Erickson (1986) called this process negative case analysis. I found several quotes that seemed to counter the rest of the data in a particular category. Some of the discrepancies were noted within the same case, which means a student seemed to contradict himself or herself. I tried to make sense of the apparent differences by looking at the context of the quotes and considering the individual cases. For instance, when looking at “family as a trusted source of unofficial history,” I noted an excerpt from Tamara that pointed to memory lapses and the “telephone game” effect that occurs in oral historical accounts. At first glance, this quote did not show trust of the family, but appeared to question the validity of her family’s stories. I read the contextual quotes to make sense of this discrepancy. Tamara explained that she could indeed trust the motivations of her family members because they would not lie to her. She was questioning, instead, the reliability of the details which became a part of her corroboration plan and form of resistance to the grand narrative. She both trusted her family’s intentions and preferred family sources over others so this quote did not serve to uproot the category. It eventually served to show a connection to another category,
“forms of resistance.” Ultimately, the negative case analysis served to make the data stronger and the labels for the categories more precise.

**Representing Data**

Based upon the categories I created, I represented the data in three ways: general description, particular description, and interpretive commentary (Erickson, 1986). General description provided a context for the data and a holistic representation of the classroom experiences. Particular description provided the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) that is necessary for understanding individual students’ experiences and the nuance of the classroom experiences. Finally, my interpretive commentary provided a framework that explained the particular and general descriptions in light of my research questions.

I chose to examine five individual cases to provide an understanding of the participants’ experiences with official and unofficial history. Findings were then analyzed for similarities and differences. The cross-case analysis was conducted to determine how the students viewed and interacted with official and unofficial historical sources and to understand the implications of these beliefs in actual instances of contradictions in their research. This approach gave voice to each of the individual students while still allowing me to make some conclusions regarding their collective classroom experience.

In summation, data analysis was a recursive process that included preparing, organizing, coding, and representing data (Creswell, 2007). Coding was conducted in a manner similar to Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) suggested process: (a) Recognition of
concepts, themes, events, and topical markers; (b) Clarification and synthesis of concepts and themes; (c) Generation of codes; (d) Sorting and grouping; and (e) Synthesis, checking, and modification of findings. As part of the final stage, a negative case analysis (Erickson, 1986) was conducted. Eight codes were considered in developing the five findings that resulted from the analysis. The five findings served to answer the original four subsidiary research questions.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a concern of interpretivist researchers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When researchers acknowledge their positionality, doubts about trustworthiness arise and the burden of proof is placed upon the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To be more specific, James (2008) explained that there is a concern that students frame their responses during interviews in order to please their teacher if the teacher is the primary researcher. The influence of the researcher is a worthwhile concern no matter what type of research is conducted. As part of the research design, I chose to observe someone else teaching in order to assuage some of these difficulties rather than trying to engage in action research while I taught my own students. I also purposefully did not express personal judgments in my interviews, and I used open-ended questions in an effort to allow students to express their honest beliefs (Niesz et al., 2008). Trustworthiness was a focus from the design stage of the study onward.

The concern for rigor is a reasonable concern in data collection and analysis. I believe researchers must engage in systematic measures throughout the study to
maximize their trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Common trustworthiness strategies for qualitative research include: member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), triangulation (Denzin, 1978), negative case analysis (Erickson, 1986), and because bracketing in the phenomenological sense is probably not possible, it is helpful to keep a record of reflexivity (Peshkin, 1988), so that one’s positionality is publically articulated. I have discussed negative case analysis in the previous section, so I will now consider member checking, triangulation, subjectivity, and issues of transferability.

**Member Checking**

Member checking in interpretivist research is a way of building trustworthiness into a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I encouraged the teacher and students to keep journals documenting their own reactions to the process of engaging in genealogy. This allowed me to check with them about their experiences later. As Graue and Walsh (1998) pointed out, we, as adults, are always the “others” when studying children. There is a large gap between adults and students. We must acknowledge that our analysis is an interpretation of the students’ interpretations or, as Geertz (1973) said, “What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (p. 9). Journals and multiple interviews were attempts to capture their interpretations in the rawest form possible. When I repeated back to them what sense I made of their thoughts, it gave them a chance to clarify. In this way, we engaged in this critical analysis together, as researcher, teacher, and students. My questions and procedures were public throughout the process. It was not possible to present the findings to the students since none of them returned to the school, but instead
enrolled in high schools all over the city. However, an altered form of member checking was built into my data collection process.

**Triangulation**

I triangulated the data through various means. Denzin (1978) suggested that three ways of triangulating methods can add to trustworthiness in any research. Using many data sources across time and space is the first way to triangulate and provides rich data for analysis (Maxwell, 1996). I employed this means of triangulation through the use of three interviews and three questionnaires with students that were evenly spaced throughout the study as well as collecting various work samples throughout the project. This offered a great deal of data and evidence of changes in beliefs.

The second type of triangulation is using different investigators. Although I was the sole researcher, I collected the data with a teacher. Her opinions and observations through her detailed journal and two interviews allowed me to view the students from a perspective besides my own (Denzin, 1978). Although she was not a true researcher in the study, the teacher’s insights proved to be quite valuable.

The final form of triangulation is using multiple methods (Maxwell, 1996). The attempt to use different methods in order to elicit rich data can be seen in the choices I made regarding data collection. Through the use of interviews, questionnaires, observations, artifact collection, and journals, I attained a significant amount of data and a quality of data that I would not have collected had I only interviewed the students. The interviews provided the richest data because I was able to see “overlapping angles” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4) since the students and the teacher had multiple ways to
“speak.” Using multiple methods of data collection is one of the benefits of engaging in a case study.

**Subjectivity**

As I mentioned in the epistemology section, I believe subjectivity is inescapable in any research. I believe that no objectivity exists, so researchers must not only acknowledge their own subjectivity, but must also systematically seek out and articulate their subjectivities throughout the research process (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin said that our personal qualities “have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (p. 17). Since the personal interaction with the data can shape what one sees, I built systematic subjectivity-seeking into my data collection methods and continued the process during analysis through rigorous and regular personal reflection and memo writing (Maxwell, 1996).

One of the issues that emerged for me during data collection was the struggle between my role as a researcher and my identity as a teacher. I discuss this struggle in the section entitled “My Role in the Family Project.” I found myself imagining what I would do as the teacher in the classroom, and I wanted to jump in and help constantly. It was only through my memo writing and my reminders to myself that I was able to keep some distance as a researcher. (See Appendix E for an example of an analytic memo.) Aside from the confusion this would add to my study, it also was a practical matter of being able to record my observations with enough detail.
I was an eighth-grade social studies teacher in an urban school. I, therefore, identified with the teacher in my study. However, I desired to see what meaning the students were making of their experiences rather than just seeing what I wanted to see. I have seen family history work wonders in my classroom, but I did not want to project that success if it was not there. Peshkin (1988) described a similar feeling.

It is a warning to myself so that I may avoid the trap of perceiving just that which my own untamed sentiments have sought out and served up as data. If trapped, I run the risk of perceiving a study that has become blatantly autobiographical. (p. 20)

By speaking with the teacher about my misgivings and by forcing myself to articulate my concerns in memos, I believe I was able to get out of my own way in order to see. My lens was not as blurry because I recognized it as my lens.

My data analysis uncovered two findings that I sincerely did not expect to see: students’ continued embrace of official history even after they recognized its bias against African Americans and their desire to turn a critical eye toward their own families’ stories. Because I did not expect these outcomes, it seems that I did allow the data to guide me. One cannot escape subjectivity (Peshkin, 1998), but one can recognize one’s own bias and create ways to systematically examine that bias throughout the research process.

**Transferability**

With the hope that teachers find my study useful, I address the issue of transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1984) described the responsibility of a researcher to
provide “the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a 
transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a 
possibility” (p. 316). I described the background of the setting and the participants in
detail and used many direct quotes from the teacher and students in the write-up. In 
addition, I used purposeful sampling of participants which included a diverse range of 
students and therefore, according to Lincoln and Guba (1984), aids in transferability. 
This sampling was an attempt to include the widest possible range of information for 
inclusion in my thick description. Thus, the reader can be informed enough to decide if 
my conclusions and suggestions may be transferable to other classrooms.

Because issues of trustworthiness are critical to meaningful qualitative research, I 
discussed the member checking, triangulation, and subjectivity-seeking that were 
intentionally designed as part of my study.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained my theoretical framework and my rationale for 
choosing case study to answer my particular questions. I described the setting for my 
study including the background of the school, teacher, and class. The participants and the 
project were depicted along with my role as a participant-observer in the research. My 
methods of data collection and analysis as well a rationale for the decisions I made were 
provided. My data included: interviews, questionnaires, observations, artifacts, and 
journals. The data were prepared, organized, coded, and represented in five findings 
(Creswell, 2007). Finally, I attempted to establish my trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba,
through a description of member checking, triangulation, subjectivity, and issues of transferability.

In the following chapter, I address the overarching question, “How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history?” by presenting findings from the subsidiary questions:

1. What do students believe about official and unofficial history?
2. What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?
3. What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented by their teachers and textbooks?
4. How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how students experience official and unofficial versions of history as they study the historical accounts of their families. I conducted an analysis of five individual cases and a cross-case analysis where I followed students on their journeys through a quarter-long family history project in an eighth grade social studies classroom.

This chapter presents findings for the overarching research question, “How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history?” The subsidiary questions included:

1. What do students believe about official and unofficial history?
2. What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?
3. What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented by their teachers and textbooks?
4. How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?

To examine the students’ beliefs about the versions of history that they learn at school and at home, I conducted individual interviews, observed small group and whole group lessons, and gathered questionnaires and work samples. As I analyzed the data, I created the following categories in my coding structure: beliefs about official history, beliefs about unofficial history, experiences of contradicting stories, and forms of
resistance. I considered my research questions and then drew conclusions about how the
students viewed the two versions of history, and how the experience of studying their
families came into play.

**Background**

I met the five participants in April of 2012 in their eighth grade social studies
classroom at Carroll Academy. I visited their classroom two to three times per week for
the last academic quarter of the school year. I observed them in whole group and small
group settings and interviewed them individually three times for approximately 30
minutes per interview. They each filled out two questionnaires and provided several
work samples along with their final family history projects. When they asked, I also
helped them with their online research.

In the following section, a brief biography of each student is provided followed by
a within-case analysis pertaining to the content of the research questions. Since I
observed the students in their classroom only, I offer a sketch of who they presented
themselves to be in a particular context. Identity seems to play a role in how individuals
experience official and unofficial history (Epstein & Shiller, 2005), so I provide an
overview of the demographics, background, interests, and characteristics of each student.
For the biographies, I weave together the students’ words, the teacher’s descriptions, and
my own observations. For the analyses, I describe emergent themes regarding the
students’ conceptions of official and unofficial history supported by their words from
interviews, questionnaires, and work samples.
The terms “official history” and “unofficial history” are used throughout the findings section. Although this was part of the initial theoretical framework, the students were introduced to the words during the project and consequently used the terms themselves. They defined the terms in opposition to one another and used their own experiences to distill the meanings. To them, official history means the story told by the textbook and the teacher. Unofficial history means the story told by their families, original documents, and sources like library books which most of them believe are not controlled by the government.

After the individual cases are described, I offer a cross-case analysis that shows the similarities and differences among the students’ conceptions of official and unofficial history as well as their experience of studying their own families.

**Jasmine: A Loner**

Jasmine, a tall, thin 14-year-old African American girl, slouches in her chair and shows no signs of engagement during her social studies class. Mrs. Swanson described her as “defiant” and said that she “questions authority” and “has as a chip on her shoulder” (FN, May 5, 2012; TI1, April 11, 2012). The teacher went on to say, “She kinda has that rebel without a cause sense to her” (TI1, April 18, 2012). Although her teacher reported that she is of average ability, she failed the first two quarters of social studies during the school year and earned a D for the third quarter (Artifact, Grade Book). She says that she does not like attending school, but is forced to go. She reports that social studies is boring, is confusing, and mostly revolves around wars. When asked what her textbook was about, she responded, “American stories and wars . . . but I really
don’t pay attention to history books” (Q1). She explained that her confusion and lack of attention stems from her mistrust of the textbook and the contradicting stories she hears. Her suspicions are discussed in detail in the official history section.

Socially, Jasmine seems lonely and bored at school. She keeps to herself and often puts her head on her desk with her eyes shut. During class, she generally ignores the other students and her teacher as she doodles in her notebook. She said, “I hate school—not because of the work but because of the teachers, staff, and students” (I1, April 27, 2012). Between her lack of interest in social studies and in socializing, Jasmine seems to have simply withdrawn. When asked about what does interest her, she explained that she likes drawing, painting, writing, and Language Arts. She seems to enjoy activities through which she can express herself. It is obvious that social studies is not one of those activities.

Jasmine became interested in the family history project very quickly. In the first questionnaire, Jasmine wrote, “I’ve always wanted my whole life to study my family history” (Q1). In our first interview, she became animated as she shared several family tales that had been passed down to her including a gruesome story about her Great Aunt. “She had a friend that was being talked about by somebody. She cut their finger off! . . . So, everybody in the neighborhood was afraid of her” (I1, April 27, 2012). She told another story about her great great grandfather who had to sneak out of Mississippi with his brother to get to Chicago. She seemed particularly interested in stories that involved some elements of mystery and secrecy.
The Project

Jasmine started the project by asking her mother and grandmother for names and birthdates of relatives. Jasmine lives alone with her mother but talks on the phone with her father and grandmother on a regular basis. The family knew very little about their background so Jasmine quickly became discouraged. She conducted Internet searches but came up with almost nothing. She interviewed her grandmother a second time to get more information about birthdays. Jasmine did not turn in an oral history project in social studies even though she reported asking her grandmother about her family’s history twice and having good discussions (FN, May 20, 2012). She reported that her mother was becoming interested in the project as well and was heading to the public library to do some investigating on her own. Jasmine asked for my help in mid-May since she had not found much on her own. We entered her family tree information into some databases and found census, marriage, and death records back to the mid-19th century. Jasmine was able to trace one particular line on her father’s side back to South Carolina in 1846.

In her final project reflection, Jasmine claimed that Mrs. Swanson and I brought “great joy” to her through this project and wrote, “I love you guys!” She reported, “This was the best social studies project ever!” (Artifact, Final Project). I witnessed a significant change in Jasmine’s body language and tone of voice when she was speaking about her family’s history as well. Mrs. Swanson reported that she was surprised at the change in Jasmine’s disposition whenever she spoke about the family history project. Jasmine “lit up” (FN, May 20, 2012). She was engaged in the classroom in a new way.
Official History: “Lies Travel”

When I first spoke with Jasmine, I wanted to find out what was causing her exaggerated lack of interest in social studies. She said, “Social studies is confusing because it’s hard to believe some stuff that’s in it” (I1, April 27, 2012). When asked about the reliability of sources in history, she bluntly stated, “It’s hard to believe anything because lies travel” (Q1). She was able to use an example where the official history she learned in school conflicted with the unofficial history she learned from her family.

I meant, like, sometimes my dad tells me different stories about the same stuff that the teachers tell me and they’re kinda different . . . So, like the Christopher Columbus thing, and he told me about that and it’s much different than the textbook . . . Like that he came over here and discovered it, but when he got here, there was people here before him . . . So, that’s not discovering it if there was somebody here before. (I1, April 27, 2012)

Jasmine was confused by the contradictions between the school and home interpretations of history. After explaining to her that I call these two versions official and unofficial history, she claimed to prefer the unofficial version because, “Unofficial history isn’t in a book that someone wrote, leaving stuff out. Important stuff” (Q2). She believes that something is missing from the official version.

She believes the textbook contains mostly lies by omission. When I asked her if the lies were intentional, she immediately responded, “Yes, I think it’s on purpose,” but she would did not say why (I1, April 27, 2012). Even with probing questions, she would not guess as to the motivation behind the lies in the first interview. As the project
continued, she was able to create a theory about why the authors might have left out some content. During the small group textbook analysis, her group concluded that there was bias in the textbook created by White men (Artifact, Work Sample). I asked her how she felt about her group’s conclusion and she replied,

I felt like, you know, everything that we found out, I mean, searched—the conclusion was true because that’s what I believed it was about in the first place.

So, when we looked it up, you know, it just confirmed it. (I2, May 11, 2012)

Jasmine said that she already suspected there was racial bias in the textbook but the activity confirmed her beliefs. So, even though she did not articulate this idea in her first interview, she claimed that this suspicion was not new. Perhaps the activity gave her the words for her previous notion.

When asked how the textbook bias was created, she posited, “Maybe they got together and was like, ‘We should make the book but not put, you know, everybody else in it’” (I2, May 11, 2012). In our final interview, Jasmine explained that the authors leave out parts in order to make the enemies look like villains and to glorify themselves. “If, you know, you tell a story but you leave a part out so you won’t look bad or, you know, you wouldn’t make somebody else look bad” (I3, May 23, 2012). Later in the interview, she again explained that pieces of unofficial history are not added because, “They want to make us look bad.” When asked who “us” was, she said, “the other races” in order to “make theyself look better” (I3, May 23, 2012). By the end of the project, she explained that White men omitted parts of the historical narrative in order to make non-White races look like villains and to make themselves look more like heroes.
Jasmine began the project with a general mistrust of official history and presented examples of the contradictions between the two versions of history but she would not offer a guess as to the motivations for the dishonesty. Over the course of the quarter, she developed some ideas about the motivation behind “the lies” and was able to articulate her beliefs. She ended the project by stating that parts of the historical narrative were intentionally omitted in order to make Whites look superior to other races.

**Unofficial History: “The Whole Story”**

Jasmine began the project with a call for more family stories in her social studies classroom. She preferred unofficial history from day one. She believed that the confusion she experiences in social studies would be diminished if oral histories were used. “I think it would like explain it more, it will have more details” (I1, April 27, 2012). She raised the idea of details again later in the project during her second interview. “The stuff we learn about from our families might have more details about what happened in about like the whole thing and some stuff that’s in the book is about a certain part and stays in that part” (I2, May 11, 2012). According to Jasmine, family history provides detail and missing pieces that the narrative needs for her full understanding.

In her exit questionnaire, Jasmine said that family history is actually the most important topic to study in social studies because, “it’s fun and educational and you learn a lot about American history and family history” (Q2). She further explained that kids can learn “different stuff about what happened that’s not in the textbook . . . like African American history, like different people . . . like Tamara’s family” (I3, May 23, 2012).
Tamara is another one of the participants. Jasmine referred to Tamara’s family members who were not slaves even though they were African Americans living in the pre-Civil War South. By the end of the project, Jasmine was not only concerned about getting more detail, but also about getting more perspectives within the central narrative.

In addition, her preference for unofficial history involves source reliability. During the source sort, Jasmine chose her family as the most reliable and honest source of history. (See Table 4.) While wondering about the contradiction in the Columbus narratives, she said that she believes her dad more than the teacher or textbook. She went on to say, “It’s not just from my Dad. It’s from my grandmother and my great grandmother. They all tell stories about different stuff that happened and it’s not in the textbook. It’s like some different stuff” (I1, April 23, 2012). Multiple family members shared unofficial accounts of history with her.

In the end, Jasmine decided that combining official and unofficial history would provide the most robust narrative for her. She believes that family history, which provides negative aspects of White American history and positive aspects of African American history, should complement the official narrative. “I think we should learn about the whole story . . . so they know the bad and the good stuff that happened and not just the good stuff” (I3, May 23, 2012). If Jasmine were a teacher, she “would talk about it . . . I would like to do both sides” (I3, May 23, 2012).

Finn: A Conspiracy Theorist

Finn, a 13-year-old boy, sneaks into class late and then flashes a big grin at his teacher. Finn seems to escape consequences when he is off-task or missing from where
he is supposed to be (FN, May 20, 2012). He looks like the students around him, but
does not report being African American. He calls himself “mixed race” but is not sure
from where his ancestors descend (Q1). Finn’s teacher reported that he is different and
somewhat isolated from his peers but he seems to fit in during social studies class as he
jokes with the kids at his table (FN, April 18, 2012). His teacher reported that he has
high academic ability which is reflected in his social studies grades for the first three
quarters of the school year: B, B, and A (Artifact, Grade Book).

Finn enjoys science class, playing the drums and guitar, and “hacking” computer
programs. Although he finds school boring, he is fascinated by conspiracy theories. He
claimed that “Social studies is interesting when . . . you have something that relates to
you” (I1, May 2, 2012). His interest depends on the topic at hand and he tries to engage
his teacher in conversations about possible conspiracies in history such as 9/11 (I1, May
2, 2012). At the time of the study, Finn was conducting independent research about
America’s role in the 9/11 attacks (SL). He lives alone with his mother and talks to her
and his grandparents about conspiracies in history on a regular basis (I1, May 2, 2012).
While discussing the guerilla warfare of the French and Indian War, one of his favorite
topics in social studies, Finn explained that he can be “semi-violent” (I1, May 2, 2012).
In the same interview, though, he claimed that “God made the world to be a peaceful
land” (I1, May 2, 2012). Finn is a complex and interesting individual who compares
himself to Walt Whitman since they “both think the government is corrupt” (I2).
The Project

Finn was determined to find out the ethnicities of his ancestors and asked his grandfather to help him fill out his family tree (I1, May 2, 2012). Although he missed the deadline for his oral history report, he eventually turned in an interview with his grandmother along with old photos of family members. His family knew their history back to the early 20th century. The journey that I took with Finn was remarkable. With the information he gleaned and the databases available online, Finn, his teacher, and I were able to trace his family deep into the 18th century.\(^4\) The databases provided us with documents such as census and slave records, war registrations, death and marriage records, grave photos, and even a link to a living relative who had already researched the family. We emailed with the newly found relative who was able to add rich stories about the lives of the ancestors.

One of Finn’s lines went back to his fourth great grandfather, William, who fought in the War of 1812 and became a slave owner in North Carolina. William’s grandfather was an immigrant from Ireland who was born in 1725. William’s wife died young and he then built a house on his property for his slave with whom he is rumored to have been in love. His descendants were free land-owning mulattos (the term used on the census records to describe light-skinned African Americans) living in Tennessee in the 1850s. The cousin that we discovered online had undergone a DNA test and compared it to William’s known descendant to prove the connection, which it ultimately did.

\(^4\) Out of the hundreds of student with whom I have worked, this is the farthest back in history I have ever researched with a student of primarily African descent. I describe his family in some detail since I will refer to it in the analysis.
Another line of Finn’s led us back to the small group of African American descendants from Egypt who created an ethnic community in the early 19th century in Tennessee. After researching this group, we discovered that history calls the members of the community “Melungeons” (Final Project, Work Sample). We found an early 20th century photo of one of the individuals from this family who resembled Finn in many ways. These African Americans were never enslaved although they lived in the South for many generations before, during, and after the Civil War.

Finn started with the goal of discovering his ethnicity and he was able to find not only his West African roots, but he found his European and North African heritage as well.

Official History: “Frauds and Liars”

Finn showed a mistrust of official history from the day I met him. When asked if the content in his history textbook was true, he wrote, “Probably not, but then again some things in the government are lies” (Q1). In his first interview, I asked him about this comment, and he explained that the government wrote the textbook and that they were intentionally misguiding the public. When I asked him why the government would lie, he replied, “It’s to hide even more secrets than they already have” (I1, May 5, 2012). He used the example of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Towers to illustrate his point. He could not explain why the government would want to blow up the buildings, but he was convinced that the story the public knew just did not add up and that the government was hiding some of the facts. He said that the attacks and cover-up showed “that the
government are frauds and liars” (I1, May 5, 2012). So, if the government wrote the textbook, which he believes, then, he concluded, it probably is filled with lies as well.

As Finn engaged in the pursuit of his own family’s history, he was able to articulate possible motivations for the bias in the text by juxtaposing the mainstream story with the stories he was discovering in his heritage. In the second and third round of interviews, Finn spoke of a situation where the experiences of his family contradicted with what he read and heard about from official sources in school. He explained that official history included stories about slaves but did not talk about African American 19th century immigrants like his Egyptian ancestors in Tennessee. He said the two versions about African American history “were very different” (I3, May 22, 2012). When I asked him to explain the differences, he said,

I think it’s because they [the government and people in general] want to make us [African Americans] seem like we are the lower race . . . because we’re of a—because us, as African Americans, are of a different nationality . . . the Caucasians—would like to benefit from that. (I3, May 22, 2012)

Finn became more adamant about the bias in official history as the project continued. On his final questionnaire, when asked again if everything in his textbook was true and what might not be true, he replied, “No—everything.” His somewhat vague suspicion from the first questionnaire changed to strong and reasoned mistrust by the end of the project.
Unofficial History: “The Lower Race”

The unofficial history that Finn learned about from his family contradicts with what he knows from his social studies classes. Further, unofficial history, according to Finn, is actively suppressed by the government. In two of the interviews, Finn told stories that he had heard from his grandfather who was in World War II. When describing what he learned in school regarding the war, he explained, “Yeah, I mean, they tell about how they swept through all these concentration camps and saved them, but what my grandfather tells me is that they drafted people at a very young age, and with very little training” (I3, May 22, 2012). In an earlier interview, I asked him why he thinks he didn’t learn about the lack of training of soldiers in school. He replied, “Because the government doesn’t want us to . . . the government doesn’t want us to know it.” I asked, “Why?” and he responded, “Because it’s corrupt and self-centered” (I1, May 5, 2012). He would not expand upon his explanations any further.

In another interview, Finn and I were discussing the effects of Manifest Destiny and he explained that, “We are supposed to think that the government is just the perfect government, and really it’s not” (I2, May 11, 2012). He suggested that many of the lies revolved around race and unofficial but true stories were actively suppressed. “They don’t want to talk about the good times of the African Americans because we are supposed to be the lower race” (I2, May 11, 2012). Finn believes that official history does not just include heroic stories of White men, but purposefully omits anything negative about White people and omits most positive stories about African Americans.
He prefers learning about unofficial history because it is “more in-depth” and “personal” (I2). He acknowledges that unofficial accounts can also have bias, but sees his family as ultimately more reliable. When I asked him who he would believe if there was a direct contradiction between his family’s version of an event and the textbook’s version, he said, “Well, it all depends because sometimes it’s biased toward a certain party . . . and some information may not be as accurate as others.” He then said that he would believe his relatives more “because they’ve actually been through it” (I1, May 5, 2012). Finn sees his family members as primary sources, which, to him, makes them more trustworthy historical sources.

By the end of the project, Finn explained that we need to learn about both official and unofficial history.

We should be learning all of American history, because really all of it is important, so . . . that way we can ensure that we learn from our mistakes . . . and that we’re not skipping like a broken record. (I3, May 22, 2012)

He believes that we can learn the most from a more diverse picture instead of the biased stories told to us by the government through our textbook.

**Rihanna: A Defense Attorney**

Rihanna is a 13-year-old girl who loves gym class and describes herself as athletic. She explained that she has a mixed background (Q1; I1, April 24, 2012). She said she is of African, European, and Central American descent. She enjoys singing, dancing, playing guitar, and writing poetry. Her teacher described her as “very articulate” and it was quickly noticeable that she loves to talk (TI1, April 18, 2012; I1).
Although Mrs. Swanson claimed that Rihanna has above-average academic ability, her social studies grades for the first three quarters were recorded as: D, C, C. Rihanna attributed some of her struggle with the homeschooling curriculum misalignment that she experienced for half of the last school year (II, April 24, 2012). She explained that she wanted to be homeschooled because she was less distracted and did not have to worry about being late to class or turning in late assignments. She told me that she and her mother decided it would be best, though, for her social development if she returned to the school for eighth grade (II, April 24, 2012).

Rihanna wants to become a defense attorney and explained that in a debate, she can “break people like a stick with just persuading them with a couple words” (II, April 24, 2012). Social studies is her favorite time of day partly because she likes to investigate history as if she were an attorney. She tries to find “rumors” in the content and will go to great lengths to disprove something that she believes is false (II, April 24, 2012). This desire to debunk myths is discussed in more detail in the analysis.

Rihanna lives with her mother, father, sister, and several pets. She explained that there are rather traditional gender roles in her family and wanted to trace her heritage to see if the gender roles were always so strictly defined. She said that her family has known discrimination in the past and shared the story of her grandmother who was, at one time, the only African American nurse working in a hospital. Rihanna shared the tale of her grandma being assaulted and called “nigger” while working (II, April 24, 2012). She liked to listen to her family’s stories but did not know a great deal about their history.
The Project

Rihanna started her project by interviewing her grandfather. He shared how times had changed, both for good and bad. He recounted the days when one could buy 10 packs of “Now and Later” candy for a dollar. But, he also told the story of his high school desire to become a doctor. His dreams were thwarted because of racism and he ended up becoming a mechanic and carpenter by default (Artifact, Final Project). He and Rihanna’s grandmother helped her with her family tree, and through her research, she was able to penetrate the 19th century records of her family. She was surprised to realize that she has deep Mexican roots, which she said helped explain to her why she was having a quinceañera (I3, May 22, 2012).

Rihanna was happy to be able to prove the traditional men in her family “wrong” when she discovered that her “great auntie” was a highly educated attorney (I2, May 8, 2012). She claimed that this was one of the biggest surprises in her research.

Official History: “Rumors”

From the beginning of the project, Rihanna spoke openly about her suspicions regarding official history. In the first questionnaire, she reported that the textbook does “not always” tell the truth. She explained that the dishonesty is more about omission, though, so there are “not really” lies in the text (Q1). She gave several examples of the missing pieces. For instance, when she learned about the French and Indian War, the textbook barely mentioned the Native Americans (I1, April 4, 2012). She also gave the example of Christopher Columbus who, she realized in about fourth grade, did not really discover America (I1, April 4, 2012). She said that she eventually realized that facts in
the story she heard in school just did not add up. I asked her if she thinks that most
teachers still teach that Columbus discovered America. She replied,

R: Sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. I mean, if you like—in a certain grade,
they kinda teach you that just to put it in your mind and then you start to
figure out more along the way, you find there is more history about it, you’ll
go, “he ain’t never found America, it can never be real and if he did, he would
find somewhere in the middle part not Florida, duh.”

I: Okay, so why don’t they just tell you that when you’re a little kid? Why do they still say he discovered it?

R: It was a—it was just an outspoken word around, a rumor, in his place that he
was gonna go find somewhere, he was gonna go past the equator, he was
gonna be somewhere in another land, and he was gonna say that he founded
America. (I, April 24, 2012)

She went on to say that there are a lot of rumors in history. When I asked her if she
minded the rumors or if she wished history could all be true accounts, she explained:

Real. I like if it was—a rumor can help me find—if you say a rumor, it can help
you find other things, it can help you identify more and you can learn more about
it. If I say, just give me a text and I just write out, I can just remember all of this
and everything. But if it’s a rumor, I can have like three pages long of why it’s
not real, why I think that it should not be there. (I, April 24, 2012)

Rihanna seemed to enjoy discovering the “rumors” in official history and then sorting
fact from fiction.
She raised the topic of rumors a second time in the interview when discussing another piece of the story that was missing from her textbook. Rihanna described how Mrs. Swanson once told them a family story about her father’s role in the Korean War, which was a different story than what was described in textbook. I asked her how she felt about the “rumors” she had mentioned. She replied:

Kinda mad because it’s not put out there real, like no one could ever stop this person from writing this. Like, when we went against the Koreans they just said that we lost the battle. No we didn’t really lose the battle; we were sent here to fire boxes of ammunition. We didn’t lose, we hurried up and picked up and left before any of us got shot. ’Cause we were not prepared. It’s kinda like, oh yeah, we lost, no. It was pretty much a rumor. (I1, April 24, 2012)

Rihanna was clear from the beginning about her belief that recorded history includes rumors that do not represent a truthful portrait of what really happened in the past.

Rihanna’s use of the word “rumors” instead of the word “lies,” which is what I heard from many of the other students, seems to embody her beliefs behind the motivations for the dishonesty. She said that many of the omissions or errors in official history are likely intentional, but they are not malicious, for the most part. She offered four distinct reasons that would explain the discrepancies between the official and unofficial versions of history: relative importance, age-related readiness, narrative structure, and preparation for testing.

The first reason Rihanna posited is that some events are not important to the storyline; some historical characters are simply not central figures. For example, she
explained that the reason the Natives are not mentioned much in the French and Indian War section of the book is because the writers “probably thought they didn’t take as much part in it” (I1, April 24, 2012). Another example she used to illustrate her claim was slavery. Although she talked at length about the problem of leaving African Americans out of the grand narrative, she defended her textbook’s writers by saying, “There wasn’t a lot of big moments in slavery” (I3, May 22, 2012). Although she seems to be looking for reasons to defend the authors, the frustration in her voice was evident in the following exchange:

They don’t really give you a lot about African American social studies stuff. They really don’t . . . I think that to them, it wasn’t important. . . . they can give you a two chapter page of how French came here and then—but they can only give you about a paragraph long of how Africans came over here because we were slaves. That’s the first thing they put out, that we were slaves. That’s the only thing you see. We were slaves and that’s it. (I1, April 24, 2012)

Rihanna seemed to be saying that the identity of the textbook authors influences what they believe to be important in writing down the history. I later asked her if the slaves’ perspectives were ever considered. She said, “No, because we were counted as slaves—we didn’t have no thought. We didn’t have no thought of putting anything, we were just there as a worker” (I1, April 24, 2012). According to Rihanna, the perspective of African Americans is not included in the story because they did not write the books and they were not seen as capable of intelligent thought by the authors at the time. Rihanna seems to contradict herself at times, but she may be simply debating both sides
of the issue aloud. She sees the problem with not writing from an African American perspective, but then dismisses the authors as just not seeing the centrality of the minority perspective since she assumes that they themselves were not minorities.

The second possible reason for the dishonesty in official history, according to Rihanna, is that teachers and textbooks have a responsibility to make the content understandable to young children. When she explained why she rated textbooks as the least reliable source of history, she said, “Not school books because they have to make it understandable for that age group” (I2, May 8, 2012). She raised the issue of age-appropriateness again in the interview: “Like I always say, they give you what they wants to give you for that year, and then wait ‘til another year to give you the real information” (I2, May 8, 2012). So, teachers and textbooks withhold information from children and make decisions about when they are ready to learn the “real” story.

When I asked Rihanna why children don’t learn the “real” Christopher Columbus story until they are older, she explained:

Well, because like, if we just take a Christopher Columbus test right now and then we was never heard of our Christopher Columbus and “Who is this dude?” and “Why is this dude wearing overalls?” and then—we would have been like “Oh no, this is not real” but then we woulda said if you could get a couple of us to go into a classroom with a whole bunch of fourth graders that was taking the test, and like this, you know what, this could have never been real. But then you like this, “It is real because when I was in your grade, that’s what we had to learn. And when
you get to our grade you gonna figure out that this was never real.” (I1, April 24, 2012)

Rihanna “figured out” the Columbus story and so she assumes that other children will figure it out when they are her age. One just does not get the “real” story in the early elementary years.

The third reason Rihanna gave for the inaccuracies in official history is the maintenance of a strong narrative structure. She said that it is “basic instinct” to tell a story with a problem and a solution. “I think they just want to get straight to the problem and solution” (I1, April 24, 2012). She believes authors want the story to be “quick to the point, easy, and short” (I3, May 22, 2012). It seems necessary to Rihanna to leave out parts of the story for the sake of readability.

The last reason that Rihanna gave is a practical one. She knows that they will need content information from social studies on future tests in their lives. She explained that they have to be able to remember certain material. When Rihanna told me a story about her grandmother’s experience of discrimination, I asked her why they do not hear about stories like that in social studies.

Because they probably want to set us on the certain basis that we need to know. . . You read this and that’ll be okay. Forget the rest of it . . . ’Cause they probably think that this will be somewhere in the future where you be needed this type of history or it may be a day where you go to take a test and the question may pop out all of the sudden. (I1, April 24, 2012)
Rihanna believes it is easier to remember simple story lines with basic information for future tests.

Although Rihanna is disturbed by the lack of minority perspectives in her official history experience, she believes that the teachers’ and textbooks’ motivations revolve around what the adults think is best for children.

**Unofficial History: “I Can’t Really Believe Nothin’ These Days”**

Rihanna sees the value in learning both official and unofficial history. According to Rihanna, unofficial history is valuable because it includes primary sources. She claimed that one’s own family is the second most reliable source of history, after library books. She sees family members as primary sources. “It’s either they lived it, experienced it, or told down a story” (I2, May 8, 2012). “If your mother lives through it, and she seen it, she will know more about it. She was there in that time and place” (I1, April 24, 2012). Rihanna’s family is reliable partly because of their experience as primary sources.

As the family history project unfolded, the examples that Rihanna used to speak about official and unofficial history in her interviews became focused around the experiences of her own and her peers’ families. In her final interview, I asked Rihanna for an instance to prove her claim that part of the story is left out in social studies. She referred to Tamara’s ancestors who were free ex-slaves and attained wealth:

That there wasn’t no black—where there wasn’t no, like free slaves. Like a rich slave. They didn’t actually really talk in the textbook about a rich, like, a slave
that was let go free, and if he was like really rich because his owner died, that
they can own their own slaves, they didn’t talk about that. (I3, May 22, 2012)
She cited Tamara’s ancestor as a voice that was left out in official history. Rihanna used
one of her own family member’s stories in another interview when she talked about her
great aunt who was an African American lawyer in the first half of the 20th century. She
explained that stories that shine a positive light on African Americans were not common
in official history, but were more common in unofficial history.

When asked which version of history Rihanna prefers, she was the most
indecisive of the group. In the second round of interviews, she said, “The official version
can give me more information,” but then she quickly changed her answer, “I like them
both pretty much.” She invented a creative solution to her desire to know both versions,
“I can learn about something in the book and then I can go ask someone in the family”
(I2, May 8, 2012). When asked who she would believe in the case of a direct
contradiction, she replied, “I don’t know; I can’t really believe nothin’ these days” (I2,
May 8, 2012). When I asked her how versions of official and unofficial history were
different, she decided the two were actually quite similar:

Stuff that’s in a book can be from people that have experienced it, and stories
handed down, or a myth. And then the stories were told from a family member,
can be the same thing. I think they’re kinda the same thing. (I2, May 8, 2012)
She recognizes that there are elements of myth in both versions of history. She seems to
appreciate both official and unofficial versions of history, but above all else, she decides
to remain a skeptic.
Chris: An Insurgent

Chris is a foot taller than most of his peers and is never seen without a thick gold chain around his neck. Fourteen-year-old Chris likes football, running, and biking, and science is his favorite subject in school. Mrs. Swanson is clearly fond of him. “He is one of the harder kids; the street has gotten to him but he is really smart with a great personality . . . He’s just jaded toward school” (TJ, April 17-18, 2012). Mrs. Swanson reported that he has low academic ability, which is reflected in his social studies grades. He failed all but the first quarter when he barely passed with a D (Artifact, Grade Book). Chris explained that he does not like social studies because he has “learned everything already” (I1, April 24, 2012). He admitted, “I mostly don’t pay attention in social studies” (Q1). Although Chris does not achieve in traditional ways in school, I noticed his insight when he pointed out the irony of raising their hands and waiting to be called on while discussing liberties such as the first amendment (FN, May 8, 2012). He is an insightful and well-respected student.

Chris lives with a large family that consists of his mother, father, sister, and three brothers. Three of his older siblings have already moved out of the house. He spoke fondly of his family members. Although he did not seem particularly interested in history, he did want to know more about his family’s past.

The Project

Chris started his project slowly and missed several assignment deadlines. Mrs. Swanson and Chris decided to call home together one day in May in order to finally complete the family tree. After entering a few names and dates into online databases,
Mrs. Swanson, Chris, and I were able to trace back six generations relatively easily since distant relatives had already researched several of Chris’ direct lines. In Chris’ maternal line, we discovered that his fourth great grandfather, Jasper, was born into slavery in Kentucky. Jasper’s father was called “Uncle Tom” according to local records and was the first black land owner in that particular county in Kentucky. Jasper died in 1895 with 60 acres of land (Artifact, Final Project.)

Chris started the project with the idea that family history probably is not very important because it is not a tested area in social studies (I1, April 24, 2012). However, later in the interview, he explained that it is important to study family history for a different reason—”Maybe if they can learn about their history, they can focus on like, the people and their past mistakes.” (I1, April 24, 2012). He said that after learning about the success in his own family, he feels like he can accomplish more in his own life (I3, May 24, 2012).

Official History: “The Whole Operation They Got Goin’”

Chris mistrusts the government and believes that the government controls all sources of official history. Therefore, he believes official history is filled with lies. This suspicion was evident to me from the first interview when Chris explained that some presidents died in office in ways the government cannot really explain. He said that the government hides secrets because “they may be afraid if it gets out, it could ruin their whole operation they got goin’ . . . Most likely the world would just go crazy” (I1, April 24, 2012).
Chris believes the government has to hide secrets, including its editing of history, in order to keep the public under control and to prevent a revolution. He raised the possibility of public unrest in his second interview as well. When I asked him to explain his claim that the textbook leaves parts out, he said:

Because there’s probably some stuff that—about, like if it was a kid in the classroom—it’s probably something, something about him in that book, like his history in that book that might surprise or scare him . . . Like if his great-grandfather was assassinated by the—like, by the government . . . Like they set it all up and he just happened to see it in the book, he can like go back to his family, tell all of them—that might start like a riot or something. (I2, May 11, 2012)

Chris believes that if the secrets that the government is hiding by keeping tight control over what is taught in social studies ever became known to the public, the people would rise up and overthrow the government.

Aside from preventing public unrest, Chris believes that the official version of history has also been created in order to protect children and to encourage racism. He said that the truth might scare children (I2, May 5, 2012) and that students are likely to get a fuller picture of history in high school. “Now that they’re older and more mature they think, like, they can handle this now” (I3, May 25, 2012). Unfortunately, according to Chris, part of what children might not be able to handle involves racism.

Chris stated that there is little content in official history about African Americans and what is there involves slavery. He said that even slaves’ voices were not heard
because “No one let ’em talk” (I1, April 24, 2012). When I asked why other African Americans are not discussed in their textbook, he shared the following:

C: Because they probably don’t want everybody to know that Blacks can achieve more.

I: Okay, why? Why wouldn’t they want—like that seems like a good thing to me that Blacks can achieve. Why wouldn’t they want to write about that?

C: Um, they never want to write about Blacks actually.

I: Why?

C: Um, probably racism back then is just, didn’t wanna put us in there.

I: So who do you think is writing the books?

C: I—at first, like, way back when the books started getting made, I thought it was the Nazis, at first . . . But, now I just think it’s the government. (I3, May 25, 2012)

Chris thinks that the textbook is so racist that he considered Nazis at one time as the possible identity of the authors. He said that racism has not improved in this country since textbooks were first written. He clearly does not believe official history.

Unofficial History: “I Know It’s Real”

Chris prefers learning about unofficial history, but he is very suspicious of all sources since the government controls the media. He explained that the TV is controlled by the government and used the example of the World Trade Center Attacks of 9/11 when all the TV channels immediately switched to live coverage of the events (I2, May 11, 2012). He claimed that the Internet is not reliable either because the government can
change the information you are reading on the screen as you are actually reading it.

“Scares you,” he added (I2, May 11, 2012). If the textbook, the TV, and the Internet are not reliable and teachers will not tell children anything that will scare them until at least high school, where, then, is Chris left to find accurate historical information? His family is the only source he trusts.

Chris told me that his father and his grandmother knew a lot about their pasts and they would be the best sources of historical information for him (I1, April 24, 2012). When I asked him the difference between the history he learns at home and the history he learns at school, he answered that, at home, “I know it’s real” (I2, May 11, 2012). I asked Chris why we do not hear family stories in school and he said that they just do not think it’s important. He, on the other hand, said that family history is the most important thing to learn about in social studies because students can use the examples of their ancestors and, “do better in the future” (I1, April 24, 2012). He wants people to learn from the mistakes of those who came before them.

Chris did not use any concrete examples of discrepancies or overlap in official and unofficial versions of history, but, in the end, he did speak about the benefit of using multiple sources. He invented a possible solution to finding the truth in history where he corroborates sources. “I can put the stories together and see like what’s, what comes up. Like, what my family told me might be in the book” (I2, May 11, 2012). Chris is hesitant to believe any source other than his family, but he is willing to consider the possibilities.
Tamara: A Moderate

Tamara, a petite 13-year-old African American girl, enjoys reading, writing, playing guitar and keyboard, and singing. Her favorite subjects are social studies and language arts. Tamara described school as, “boring but I like it” (I1, April 27, 2012). She is well-liked by her peers and has an air of maturity that makes her stand out in a quiet way (FN, May 22, 2012). Her teacher reported that she has high academic ability and that she has earned strong grades in social studies this year: a B, B, and A in the first three quarters of the year (Artifact, Grade Book).

My observations echo her teacher’s view that she is a very bright student. Tamara has a remarkable capacity for attention to detail and is highly insightful (FN, May 4, 2012). For instance, while participating in a textbook analysis, she noticed that the authors “make America sound like victims.” In the same activity, she wondered aloud if the names of the authors sound ethnic (particularly, Asian and Latino) in order to make it seem like they value multiculturalism even though the content in the book does not reflect that sentiment (FN, May 9, 2012). She also showed a sophisticated view of history when she explained that Manifest Destiny was positive because it helped in nation-building, but negative because it caused killings and displacement (Artifact, Work Sample).

Tamara lives with her mother, her new step-father, her brother, and her beloved turtle. Although she had heard many family stories, she did not know much about her family’s past at the beginning of the project.
The Project

Tamara began the family history project with interest and was able to trace back to the early 20th century by talking with her family. She shared with me that her grandmother always talks about how difficult the old days were as she had to walk a distance to a well to get water. She says that her grandma uses stories like that to exemplify how lazy Tamara and her brother are. Tamara laughed as she told me she could not believe she was actually asking her grandmother to talk about the old days. She used to hate when her grandmother told those stories, but at the time of the study, she was begging her to retell every detail (I1, April 27, 2012).

Tamara interviewed her great grandmother and brought in a very old photograph of her great grandfather. Tamara asked Mrs. Swanson and me to help her with her Internet searches. We were able to find many documents that took her back to the 19th century in three of her family lines. She found that one branch of her family was from Ethiopia and Syria and that no one in that line was ever enslaved. A second line led her to the early 1800s where Isaac, a slave owner, was the father of one of the slaves. Because the slave records were difficult to interpret, there was some confusion as to whether the owner was Black or White. We deduced that either the owner was a European American or that an African American relative had likely bought his own family out of slavery. A third line led Tamara to early Reconstruction documents that had just recently been made available online. Tamara’s fourth great grandfather who was born in 1845 signed an oath to America and registered to vote in the South in 1867. She
included the documents in her Final Project (Artifact, Final Project). Tamara was pleased with the quantity and quality of documents she found.

**Official History: “Mental Slavery”**

Tamara has the most moderate beliefs of the group. She stated that there must be inaccuracies in the textbook because she noticed distinct perspectives within the text. For example, when speaking of the Boston Massacre, Tamara explained that a riot broke out and her book could give “two totally different stories. So I think that it’s not always the truth. It’s what people want other people to believe, and how they wanna tell it” (I3, May 23, 2012). She noticed bias in the textbook, but, in the beginning of the study, she was “not sure” if the bias was intentional (I1, April 27, 2012).

Tamara offered four possible motivations behind the bias. In the first two interviews, the reasons given presumed the innocence of the textbook’s authors for the most part. In the last interview, she placed blame squarely on the shoulders of the authors whose identities inform their decisions. Her beliefs seemed to have changed throughout the course of the study.

During the project, Tamara learned that one of her ancestors may have purchased his enslaved family members once he himself became free. While discussing why she had never heard anything about instances like that in social studies, she explained that it was probably not included because these are rare instances that did not need to be written into the story. In the same interview, she acknowledged that there seems to be two versions of history and the content in official history is chosen by the authors of the texts based upon their perceived importance. She explained, “I think there’s two versions of
history because maybe, maybe some people saw that this, a certain part was important and the other part wasn’t important or maybe they just didn’t care about that fact” (I2, May 8, 2012). She did not seem especially bothered by the idea that what she learned about in her own family was generally not included in the mainstream social studies content.

As Tamara continued her project and engaged in activities like the textbook analysis, she became more skeptical and more upset by the bias she perceived. In her final interview, we discussed the lack of information in her textbook about free blacks in the South such as her ancestors. I asked Tamara to talk more about her idea that the authors just did not want to talk about these topics. She explained:

Maybe they just didn’t want us to know . . . it’s the type of thing like, mental slavery where when you think you didn’t come from—from anybody special or anything, that you think that you won’t ever be anything, and that’s what you’re gonna be. (I3, May 23, 2012)

Tamara’s description of “mental slavery” included the notion that those who create official history do indeed have intent behind their bias and that it is probably racially motivated. She explained to me, “I guess White European men wrote it” (I3, May 23, 2012). In her textbook analysis, the teacher had differentiated the assignment for Tamara since she needed more challenge than the other students. She was asked to examine the identities of the authors in the “About the Authors” section of the book. Tamara pointed to the fact that the names of the authors sounded multicultural, but she did not quite believe that a diverse group could have the written the biased textbook. She and Rihanna
discussed the situation and compared it to including a child in a wheelchair in a group of students for a photo just to make it seem like it was a diverse group when it was really just for show (FN, May 9, 2012).

She offered a fourth possible reason for the bias in her final interview that, again, is related to the identity of the textbook authors. We were discussing the term “mulatto,” which appeared frequently in the census records, and inferred the possibility of rape in some cases. I wondered aloud why we do not hear about this tragic, but common practice in social studies classes. Tamara said, “I guess they don’t wanna seem lowly . . . They don’t wanna look bad.” When I asked who doesn’t want to look badly, she answered, “The descendants of the guys who did it.” She told me the descendants must be the authors of the textbook (I3, May 23, 2012). If the authors of the textbook are the descendants of the people in history who have committed immoral acts, then, it would seem to Tamara, they would be inclined to leave those parts out of the historical record. Tamara concluded that the identity of the authors is directly related to the bias in official history.

**Unofficial History: “The Right to Know Everything”**

Tamara seems to trust unofficial history slightly more, but she takes a balanced approach when it comes to the two versions. She sees merit and fault in both accounts and showed significant skepticism toward unofficial history during the study. She explained, “I like them both because, I mean, it’s some truth in both of them, and I’m sure some fault in both of them” (I2, May 8, 2012). When I asked her who she would believe if a direct contradiction existed between the two versions, she said, “I would try
to maybe research it, but probably I would go with unofficial history . . . it just sounds better to hear it from your family or, you know, stories that were passed down from generations” (I2, May 8, 2012).

Tamara prefers unofficial history; however, she does not blindly believe unofficial historical accounts. She laughed during the second interview while explaining that her grandma isn’t always “completely sane” (I2, May 8, 2012). She sees the possibility of inaccuracies due to individuals’ memories and the changes people can make while repeating oral histories. “When you pass down stories a lot, sometimes they get messed up, you know? . . . It’s like playing telephone, you start with one thing, then you end up with something totally different” (I2, May 8, 2012). She acknowledged that her family may not intentionally lie to her; “I don’t think my family would lie to me. My family—they usually always tell me the truth” (I1, April 27, 2012). She is, however, skeptical of the process of oral history, which is a common practice in creating unofficial historical accounts.

Tamara decided that official history and unofficial history could ultimately complement one another.

I think everyone has the right to know the whole story . . . I mean, it’s not right for people to be living a lie, to believe whatever someone else tells them and it’s not the truth . . . I think they have a right to know everything. (I3, May 23, 2012) She thinks it may be possible to study unofficial history along with official history in school, but she is “not sure the government would allow it” (I3, May 23, 2012). By the end of the study, Tamara recognized that there might be intentional bias in the way
students are taught history but she figured that the best chance for preventing “living a
lie” would be to learn about both versions of history and to conduct her own research.
Her balanced approach is the most moderate of the participants.

Cross-Case Analysis

Five individual cases were examined to provide an understanding of the
participants’ experiences with official and unofficial history. Findings were then
analyzed for similarities and differences. The cross-case analysis was conducted to
determine how the students viewed and interacted with official and unofficial historical
sources and to understand the implications of these beliefs in actual instances of
contradictions in their family research. I conducted a collective case study, an
instrumental study extended to several cases (Stake, 2005), because I focused upon one
main concern, students’ experiences with official and unofficial history, through several
students’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). I purposefully selected multiple cases to
investigate different perspectives on the single issue within a bounded context—which is
what collective case studies do best (Yin, 2003).

As a result of the cross-case analysis, five major findings emerged: (a) the
students were suspicious of the official historical story in the form of their textbook and
teacher; (b) they shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the
dishonest accounts in their textbooks, and the rationales changed in similar ways
throughout the course of the project; (c) although they had limited experience with
unofficial history before the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources
with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources; (d) the
experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction between unofficial and official accounts in the classroom; and (e) students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history by the end of the study.

The first two findings relate to the students’ beliefs about official history. The third finding relates to their beliefs about unofficial history. The fourth and fifth findings describe the interplay that occurred between official and unofficial versions of history when studying family history.

Beliefs About Official History

The students were suspicious of the official version of history from the beginning of the project. They reported that their social studies textbook and teacher present an untruthful portrait of U.S. history. Although they perceived different motivations behind the dishonesty at first, they generally agreed that the government was responsible for the situation since the government controls the teacher and textbook authors. First, I describe their views on their textbook and teacher. Next, I describe their early rationale for the cause of the inaccuracies. Since their beliefs about the motivations behind textbook accounts seems to have changed over the course of the project, I provide an overview of the rationales they developed by the end of the project.

**Finding one: The students were suspicious of the official historical narrative in the form of their textbook and teacher.** The students were suspicious of official history as presented to them by their teacher and textbook. They believed both the textbook authors and teacher were ultimately controlled by the government. However,
they generally believed that the textbook authors had more malicious intent than the teacher who was relatively innocent.

The Source Sort Activity results in Table 4 are included to show the trends across the cases in regard to the credibility of historical sources. These trends are mentioned throughout the findings.

**The textbook.** In the first round of interviews, the students universally held suspicions about the accuracy of their textbook. Rihanna called the inaccuracies “rumors” (I1, April 24, 2012); Finn called them “lies” (I1, May 2, 2012); and Chris called them “secrets” (I1, April 24, 2012). Jasmine said, “Social studies is confusing because it’s hard to believe some stuff that’s in it” (I1, April 27, 2012). In the first questionnaire, Rihanna wrote, “My textbook does not always tell the truth” (Q1). Tamara believed that the textbook only shows the American Colonists’ perspective, which inherently causes inaccuracies in the historical account. She tentatively offered an example, “Something I think would be inaccurate would probably be, like they might say, an Indian crossed the boundary or something and that’s how the war started but it might be something totally different, but I’m not really sure” (I1, May 23, 2012). Furthermore, during the Source Sort Activity, the students collectively ranked the textbook the fourth most reliable historical source out of six, only ranking above TV and the Internet. (See Table 4.) All five of the students questioned the authenticity of the story they read in their textbook.
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<th>Individual and Collective Student Rankings During Source Sort Activity</th>
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All five of the participants also believed they were being intentionally misled by the authors of the textbook. Three of the five students, Chris, Finn, and Rihanna, reported that the government writes social studies books (II, April 24, 2012; May 2, 2012; April 24, 2012). Jasmine would not guess who the authors are (II, April 27, 2012) and Tamara guessed that professors write the books (II, April 27, 2012). Since the
perceived motivations of the textbook authors fall under the umbrella of the second finding, I go into detail in the rationale section after I describe the role of the teacher.

**The teacher.** The students did not entirely trust their teachers to give them accurate historical accounts either, but they did not hold the teachers accountable for their curricular choices. The students ranked the social studies teacher as the third most reliable source of historical information. (See Table 4.) Their beliefs about teachers seemed to remain consistent throughout the project. Jasmine and Rihanna both pointed to the example of misinformation presented to them by their elementary social studies teachers in regards to the story of Christopher Columbus. Jasmine said, “Sometimes my dad tells me different stories about the same stories that the teachers tell me” (I1, April 27, 2012). Rihanna stated that the teachers have to make history age-appropriate and “to the point” for children. “Like I always say, they give you what they wants to give you for that year, and then wait ‘til another year to give you the real information” (I2, May 8, 2012). Chris shared the belief that students receive a more accurate portrayal of history in school as they age; “Now that they’re [students] older and more mature, they [teachers] think, like, they can handle it now” (I3, May 24, 2012). The students believe their teachers have good intentions behind their less-than-truthful portrayals of history.

All of the participants believe that their teachers are constrained by outside forces. For the most part, they claim that teachers cannot choose their own content. Jasmine and Chris claimed that Mrs. Swanson must teach what the administrators make her teach (I1, April 27, 2012; April 24, 2012). Tamara believes Mrs. Swanson must follow the textbook, and if she strays from that, Tamara is “not sure the government would allow it”
Finn has a well-developed theory about the hierarchy that dictates a teacher’s curricular choices. He claimed that the state government tells Mrs. Swanson what to teach through standards made by federal education officials. “They only write what the government tells them to write or I believe they’d get in trouble” (I1, May 2, 2012). Finn does not believe his teacher has much say in her decisions. The government is ultimately responsible for the curricular choices in social studies. The students believe their teachers do not tell them the whole truth, but they are not upset by the dishonesty since teachers are constrained by outside forces and/or trying to protect and enable children.

Finding two: Students shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the dishonest accounts in their textbook, and the rationales changed in similar ways throughout the course of the project. The students began the project with differing rationales for the motivations of the textbook author. By the end of the project, the rationales were strikingly similar. The students believed that the perceived dishonest accounts in their textbooks were intentional acts of racism.

Early rationales. When asked at the beginning of the study what the authors’ motivations could be, the two male students blamed corruption of the government. Finn explained that the government must lie in order “to hide secrets that they already have” and called the government “corrupt and self-centered” (I1, May 2, 2012). Chris said that if the truth came out in textbooks, it “might start a riot or something . . . most likely the world would just go crazy” (I1, April 24, 2012). Finn used the example of his belief in the U.S. government’s involvement in the 9/11 attacks (Q1) and Chris referred to past
mysterious presidential assassinations as proof that the U.S. government is corrupt (I1, April 24, 2012). The boys believed that government corruption is responsible for the lies that are included in official history.

The female students believed that the inaccuracies and biases were intentional but that the motivations were less malicious. Since Jasmine did not know the identities of the authors, she did not want to guess at their motivations (I1, April 27, 2012). After the textbook analysis, Jasmine decided that racism may have played a role when her group concluded that the authors were White (Artifact, Work Sample). She said she suspected the racism earlier but did not say it (I3, May 23, 2012). Tamara identified the biases, but, at the beginning of the study, she did not connect them directly to the authors who she claimed wrote the text (I1, April 27, 2012). Rihanna, on the other hand, presented a list of possible motivations that revolved around practical matters of telling and remembering a story. She reported that the authors try to tell a concise story with a problem and solution that applies directly to the content that children are able to understand and will need to know on tests (I1, April 24, 2012). So, the “rumors” and omissions in the text were necessary to maintain the narrative structure and to align with the school curriculum. Both Tamara and Rihanna were bothered by the lack of content about African Americans in their textbook, but they did not place blame on the authors in the early stages of the study.

**Later rationale: “Mental Slavery.”** The students’ views of the textbook and their perceived motivations of the authors changed by the end of the project. Their suspicions
grew into strong mistrust and their rationales unanimously included racial bias as the driving force by the time of the final interviews.

In the later part of the study, including interviews two and three as well as the final questionnaire, all five of the students claimed multiple times that the authors of social studies textbooks intentionally omit positive stories about African Americans from the historical account and only include brief, negative portrayals of them as a result of racism. They claimed that the intention of the authors is to maintain White supremacy in the U.S. Tamara called the goal of the authors “mental slavery” (I3, May 23, 2012). When I asked her why the authors did not talk about successful freed slaves like her ancestors, she explained,

Maybe they just didn’t want us to know . . . It’s the type of thing like, mental slavery where when you think you didn’t come from—from anybody special or anything, that you think that you won’t ever be anything, and that’s what you’re gonna be. (I3, May 23, 2012)

Tamara believes that omitting stories from the past has a negative impact on the achievement of African Americans today. She also concludes that the authors of the textbooks must be White men who descend from the central characters in the grand narrative since African Americans would not omit stories about their own ancestors (I3, May 23, 2012). She believes the identity of the authors plays a role in “mental slavery.”

The other students’ accounts align with Tamara’s. For instance, Finn believed the government officials who write the textbook consist of only White men. When I asked him to explain the bias, he said, “I think it’s because they [the government and people in
general] want to make us [African Americans] seem like we are the lower race . . .
because we’re of a—because us, as African Americans, are of a different nationality . . .
the Caucasians—would like to benefit from that” (I3, May 22, 2012). Chris, like Finn
and Tamara, also believes that the lack of content about African Americans has a purpose
“because they probably don’t want everybody to know that Blacks can achieve more . . .
Um, they never want to write about Blacks actually.” When I asked why, he replied,
“Probably racism back then is just, didn’t wanna put us in there” (13, May 24, 2012).
Chris described the omissions as racially motivated as well. Jasmine summed up the
sentiment of the group: “If, you know, you leave a part of a story out so you won’t look
bad . . . they want to make us look bad . . . to make themselves look better” (I3, May 23,
2012). The students came to believe that official history, particularly in the form of their
textbook, is racially biased.

In summation, the students do not trust the grand narrative itself or the sources
from which it derives. The participants’ mistrust of textbook authors grew throughout the
project and their rationales about the authors’ motivations became race-related by the
end. Although they believe their teachers leave out part of the truth, they do not think
there is any malicious intent on the part of the teachers.

Beliefs About Unofficial History

At the beginning of the study, the students reported little previous exposure to
unofficial history. The limited experiences they had involved self-discovery, family
input, or teacher stories. All five of the students prefer learning about history through
unofficial sources due to their connections to the sources, multiple perspectives, and a
multitude of primary sources. In the end, all five of the participants independently suggested that they would like to combine both official and unofficial versions of history in a process of corroboration. The students experienced concrete situations where they were forced to deal with conflicting versions of history while they were researching their families. Examples of these contradictions and the resistance students showed in the face of the contradictions are described in the interaction section.

Finding three: Although they had limited experience with unofficial history before the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources. The students did not report much previous interaction with unofficial history at the beginning of the study. After they were exposed to unofficial accounts during the family history project, they claimed to prefer using unofficial sources more than official sources. They warned, however, that unofficial sources can be biased and filled with errors so one should corroborate using many sources. This finding is discussed in three different sections since there are three distinct claims in the finding: little previous interactions with unofficial history, a preference for unofficial sources during and after the project, and the need to corroborate official and unofficial sources.

Previous exposure to unofficial history. In the first questionnaire and interview, the students were asked about their perceptions of unofficial history. They were asked to point to events or people about which they had heard differing stories. Two of the students raised the topic of the exploration story about Christopher Columbus. Jasmine and Rihanna reported that the narrative that textbooks and teachers tell about Columbus,
is, in fact, not true. Jasmine said that her father taught her that the Natives were already in the Americas so Columbus did not discover anything (II, April 27, 2012). Rihanna reported figuring out her own unofficial version because the facts about Columbus just did not add up. She said that by fourth grade, she realized that the official story of Columbus just could not be true. “Christopher Columbus did not find America. The people who were in America found America” (II, April 24, 2012). Neither of the girls accepted the official story of Columbus’ exploration.

Chris and Finn discussed more recent events that are in conflict with the official version of events told by the government. Finn said that he and his family have talked at great length about the implausibility of the World Trade Center buildings being destroyed by foreigners on commercial plans. At the time of the study, he was actively “researching” the truth behind 9/11 (SL). Chris was interested in the possibility of UFOs and had talked with his brother about what the government knows and is currently hiding regarding this topic (II, April 24, 2012). He was also interested in researching the supposed causes of death of any U.S. Presidents who died in office (II, April 24, 2012). Both of these boys considered their family members’ views as more reliable than the information they heard from TV, the Internet, and government documents regarding their topics of interest.

Tamara, like Rihanna, independently decided that events reported by the textbook are missing large parts of the story (II, April 27, 2012). Tamara raised the instance of the Boston Massacre as an example of an event that can be perceived very differently depending upon the perspective from which the story is told. She does not believe the
official version that she learned about in school because it was told from an American Colonial perspective (I1, April 27, 2012). She also questioned the authenticity of a story she read about in her textbook regarding a Native American crossing a boundary, which was reported as the cause of a battle. This never seemed plausible to her and she believes the Native was a scapegoat for the real instigator. At the time of the study, she had not been able to confirm her suspicions, but she believes there is another story that needs to be told.

There was a single instance from all the interviews where a student explicitly heard about an unofficial version of a historical event in school. Rihanna reported that Mrs. Swanson told the class a family story about her father who was in the Korean War (I1, April 24, 2012). She told the students that the U.S. soldiers were not well-supported and ran out of ammunition during the War. She said that the government did not tell the details of this situation to the public since it would make the government look badly, but that she knew it was true because of the stories told to her by her father. Other than that single instance, neither the students nor the teacher could think of any situations where they had discussed a version that differed from the official version in the textbook during the academic year.

The preference for unofficial history. Once the students had engaged in family history, they all reported in their final interviews that they would choose studying unofficial versions of history over the official version. The reasons they offered include issues of source reliability—connection to sources, multiple perspectives, and primary sources. They collectively defined unofficial historical sources as family and
non-government controlled media such as library books. Tamara said, “I believe unofficial history more because there are stories that were passed down through history and were not chosen or edited” (Q2). Jasmine, Finn, and Chris are adamant about their preference for unofficial sources while Rihanna and Tamara are more tentative about their preference. Jasmine, Finn, and Tamara each explained that their families would not lie to them. Tamara said, “My family—they usually always tell me the truth” (I1, April 27, 2012). Chris said, “I know it’s real from my family” (I2, May 11, 2012). The students believe their family members would have no motivation to lie to them.

The second reported reason for their preference involves hearing about different kinds of people from multiple perspectives. Jasmine, Tamara, and Rihanna each talked about finding the missing pieces of the story, especially the details from African American experiences. When asked why she would favor studying unofficial versions, Jasmine explained, “Because then I learn about everything and not just a certain part” (I2, May 11, 2012). While discussing slavery, Tamara explained, “I think everyone has a right to know the whole story . . . I think they have the right to know everything” (I3, May 23, 2012). Rihanna added, “Teaching from more perspectives is the best way to do it” (I3, May 22, 2012). The students demand a more complete and diverse portrait of history.

The final reported reason for their preference is the interaction with primary sources in their research. Finn, Chris, and Rihanna spoke repeatedly about the reliability of sources that were “there in that time and place . . . If your mother lived through it, and she seen it, she will know more about it” (Rihanna, I1, April 24, 2012). When asked who
he believes, Finn replied, “My relatives . . . because they’ve actually been through it” (I1, May 2, 2012). Tamara extended the belief to first-person accounts in books. When talking about reliability of library books, Tamara said, “I think they’re a lot of writers from, you know, the past. Like a lot of people wrote and like, it’s just better to hear it from somebody that may have been there” (I2, April 27, 2012). Students favor primary sources in their research because they believe those who were at the events know more about what happened.

Combining official and unofficial sources. The students clearly trust unofficial versions of history more than official; however, they unanimously and independently created the idea that the most reliable way to find out about history would be to investigate both official and unofficial stories and practice corroboration of sources. When I asked Chris why he would choose both, he replied, “So I can put the stories together and see like what’s—what comes up. Like, what my family told me might be in the book” (I2, May 11, 2012). Rihanna created a similar idea; “I mean, I can learn about something in the book and then I go ask someone in the family” (I2, May 8, 2012). She devised a plan for her own research, which again included corroboration of multiple types of sources:

Well, first, I start off with, I um, go look in some books, then I go to the Internet, and then I ask my mother for the um, some of the things that she know about it from when she’s in school, she usually knows a lot about it and then I usually put it all together and I come up with my own part of it. (I1, April 24, 2012)
The students want to collect as many sources and versions as possible and then decide on their own what is true.

Several of the students are very careful about how they interpret the sources as well. They all want to use both official and unofficial versions of historical accounts; however, Tamara, Finn, and Rihanna warn against accepting any version (including their families’) without corroborating with other sources. Tamara explained,

I like them both because, I mean, it’s some truth in both of them, and I’m sure some fault in both of them . . . but it’s just good to know both of them . . . I would try to research it. (I2, May 8, 2012)

She said that her grandmother’s memory was not always reliable and that oral history involved an element of the “telephone game.” “When you pass stories down a lot, sometimes they get messed up, you know? It’s like playing telephone, you start with one thing, then you end with something totally different” (I1, April 27, 2012). When asked who Finn would believe, he said, “Well, it all depends because sometimes it’s biased towards a certain party and some information may not be as accurate as others” (I1, May 2, 2012). Rihanna was most skeptical when she said, “I don’t know; I really can’t believe nothin’ these days” (I2, May 8, 2012). She, like Tamara, concluded that both versions may contain errors.

Stuff that’s in a book can be from people that have experienced it, and stories handed down, or a myth. And then the stories were told from a family member, can be the same thing. I think they’re kinda the same thing. (I2, May 8, 2012)
Rihanna acknowledged that there may be myth in both versions, although she ultimately settled on family history as the most reliable. Although Jasmine and Chris tended to believe unofficial history rather uncritically, they too mentioned the need to use both versions with elements of corroboration. All the students want to use as many sources as possible before they decide what is “true to me” (Rihanna, I1, April 24, 2012).

The students warned against blind trust of another unofficial source as well. During the Source Sort, the Internet was seen as the least reliable source. All of the students, with the exception of Chris, believed the Internet was an unofficial source of history. Chris believed it was controlled by the government, so that inherently made it more of an official source. The students reported that the Internet could be used as one of many sources, but, as Rihanna said, “I could type up anything on Wikipedia and can say it was real or fake . . . I could never trust the Internet” (I2, May 8, 2012). They reported that their mistrust of the Internet came from warnings from both their families and their teacher. Mrs. Swanson said that she had an explicit conversation with the class about the unreliability of the Internet (TI2, June 12, 2012). The students repeated this notion several times throughout the interviews.

Although the students prefer using unofficial sources, they warn about the credibility issues with these sources. They suggest being careful with stories from families, accounts from the Internet, and other unofficial sources. One must corroborate with other sources regardless of the type of source.
Interactions Between Official and Unofficial Versions of History

This section discusses the instances of interaction between official and unofficial versions of history during the family history project and includes descriptions of the fourth and fifth findings. The interactions included contradictory versions of historical accounts and the students’ desire to utilize both official and unofficial sources while creating their own versions of history in acts of resistance to the grand narrative.

Finding four: The experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction between official and unofficial accounts in the classroom. The students prefer using many sources for their research; however they periodically experienced contradictions between sources. Each of the students came across difficult circumstances when something they learned about their own or a peer’s family opposed something they knew from the official version of history. In all of these cases, the students decided that the family stories were more accurate. They had all learned that African Americans in the South until the Civil War were slaves and that after they were freed, they were powerless and poor. Three of the students raised the topic of a family story from Tamara in our final interviews, which did not align to this story they had learned in school. Jasmine said, “Tamara . . . she said one of her greats . . . was a slave and went to the North and got rich and came back and bought his family” (I3, May 23, 2012). Rihanna stated,

They didn’t actually really talk in the textbook about a rich, like, a slave that was let go free, and if he was like really rich because his owner died, that they can own their own slaves, they didn’t talk about that (I3, May 22, 2012)
Although there was some confusion about the accuracy of the slave record she found, it appeared that one of Tamara’s African American ancestors owned Black slaves. Through discussion, we concluded that the race notation was either a mistake or the slave was freed and bought his own family members out of slavery so was considered the owner (FN, May 4, 2012). The students were impressed that a freed slave could earn money and even own land. They were struck by the fact that they had never heard about these kinds of situations from their textbook or teachers in school.

Students were bothered by other similar contradictions. For example, Chris made reference to his own ancestors’ achievement by wondering aloud why the textbook does not mention powerful African American land owners in the South during the 19th century like the ancestors about which he learned. When asked about his family, Finn had a similar experience. “That was also a lie because you know and Mrs. Swanson knows that I had a family of immigrants that came over here and were never slaves” (I3, May 22, 2012). Finn also brought up the mismatch between what he has read about heroic Americans in World War II who saved victims in concentration camps and the young, unprepared U.S. soldiers who were drafted and did not have much of a choice about their fates (I3, May 22, 2012). The stories he heard at home and the ones he heard at school just did not align easily. Rihanna cited a similar misalignment by describing her pleasant surprise when she learned of a great aunt who was a powerful black attorney in the days before women or African Americans held many degrees (I2, May 8, 2012). The students wondered why the depictions of African Americans in the official version of history did not align with the research they were conducting within their own families.
The teacher confirmed this observation. When I asked her what she perceived when the students discovered a fact from their research that did not match up to the official story they knew, she used Chris as an example:

You got that stunned silence . . . Yeah, but I mean, he was just kinda, I don’t think he kinda knew what exactly, I don’t think he knew how to process. Because you’re told the story so much. You’re African American, hence, you have to be descended from slaves. And that’s so engraved that they think that when that was presented to them it starts a conflict of identity. You know? Can I really identify with this group I am forced to identify with my entire life? And you know in a lot of ways, he struggles with that on his own. (TI2, June 12, 2012)

Mrs. Swanson tried to explain what the students may have been thinking during the experiences where official and unofficial history did not align. Being African American did not necessarily mean being descended from slaves. This seemed to be a new idea to the class.

**Finding five: Students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative by the end of the study.** The students displayed forms of resistance to the grand narrative in the beginning of the study, which changed by the end of the study. The early forms of resistance were not particularly productive for the students as they disengaged from the curriculum and the instruction. The students all came to a similar place by the end of the study where their resistance involved active research of both official and unofficial sources in a process of corroboration. A desire to engage in
practices of an historian in order to create their own version of history is likely more productive for them than ignoring the teacher and textbook.

**Early forms of resistance.** The students showed differing forms of resistance to the grand narrative in the beginning of the study. As I described in their biographies, Jasmine and Chris simply disengaged from the social studies curriculum, which was reflected in their demeanor and social studies grades. When asked why she did not like the class, Jasmine explained, “Social studies is confusing because it’s hard to believe some stuff that’s in it” (I1, April 27, 2012). She linked her lack of interest to her disbelief. Chris did not believe in “the whole operation they got goin’” (I1, April 24, 2012) but did nothing to actively resist the system. Both students felt disconnected to the curriculum and were passive resistors.

Finn, Rihanna, and Tamara found a different way to resist the grand narrative. They used words like “annoying” and “mad” to describe their feelings about the grand narrative (Finn, I1, May 2, 2012; Rihanna, I1, April 24, 2012); however, they actually engaged with the material in order to debunk the myths. Rihanna described liking social studies for the very reason that Jasmine did not like social studies. As I described in the biography section, Rihanna looks for “rumors” in the narrative, which she can “figure out” or debunk (I1, April 24, 2012). Finn looks for possible conspiracies in history and then researches them. Tamara resists the narrative by quietly questioning historical perspectives. She said, “I think that it’s not always the truth. It’s what people want other people to believe, and how they wanna tell it” (I3, May 23, 2012). The grades of the three students are relatively high (see Table 1) which shows some form of engagement
with the content, even if it is just memorization. Although each student resisted differently, they all showed some form of resistance to the grand narrative in the beginning of the project.

**Later forms of resistance.** By the end of the study, each of the five students chose to resist the grand narrative in a strikingly similar way. As I discussed in the third finding, each of the students independently came to the conclusion that using both official and unofficial sources in a process of corroboration would produce the most accurate results in finding what was true to them. They reported the desire to check what they learn about in school with their families and, in turn, try to find events mentioned in family stories in school and library books. They felt that this kind of back and forth interplay between the two versions would help to fill in the missing pieces of the American story without sacrificing reliability. The students warned against accepting any version of history as truth without using multiple sources from multiple perspectives in order to create their own versions. This method of research serves as a way of resisting the grand narrative without dismissing it completely.

The effort to corroborate using official and unofficial sources serves as a more productive form of resistance. The students’ earlier ways of resisting involved either disengaging, which resulted in failing the class and not learning much, or in hyper-focus on certain events in history, such as Finn’s 9/11 fixation, which did not allow for a very comprehensive view of history. The early forms of resistance were not particularly helpful to the students in the context of the social studies classroom. The new form of resistance, that I call corroboration, involved the students’ desire to engage with many
historical sources in a critical way. They seemed to be giving themselves practice in historical thinking while interacting with the social studies curriculum. They became agents in historical investigations that mattered to them. This seems to be a more productive practice for them than their earlier forms of resistance.

**Cross-Case Summary**

In summation, the students had limited experience with unofficial history and various forms of resistance before the project. In the end, they all preferred using unofficial sources. They warn, however, that these sources need to be corroborated with official sources as well, to create a more accurate and balanced picture of history. They experienced concrete contradictions between their families’ stories and the content they had learned in school and were able to navigate the rocky terrain by becoming more critical of their textbook’s inaccurate portrayal of African Americans and more inclusive of all sources in a productive act of resistance.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed a case study of five participants as well as a cross-case analysis. The findings indicate that the students’ initial suspicions of official history were confirmed by the end of the project. They believe their textbook plays a major role in the perceived dishonest accounts. Although they believe their teacher plays a role as well, they claim that she is rather helpless to do otherwise. They perceived several reasons for the imperfect portrayal of historical accounts in their textbook including an early explanation of a corrupt government and a later, more specific rationale involving racism. The findings regarding unofficial history indicate that even though students have had
limited exposure to unofficial history, they prefer unofficial sources because they generally trust their families, desire multiple perspectives, and appreciate primary sources. However, they warn against blind trust of any particular source and encourage source corroboration. They devised a method of resistance through research whereby official and unofficial versions of history are combined to create their own believable historical accounts. After experiencing actual instances where official and unofficial versions conflicted, the students tend to believe their families but insist upon corroborating sources in a productive act of resistance. They sound a call for more plentiful and accurate portrayals of African Americans in the integrated and new versions of history.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

U.S. students are taught a particular narrative about the founding and development of their nation in social studies classes today. This version of history, called “official history” (Wertsch, 1998), is problematic and exclusive as it represents the experiences of a very limited group of people (Lowenthal, 1998). Many students of color are unengaged and suspicious of this grand narrative that speaks of other people’s histories (Epstein, 1997).

Researchers have suggested that an alternative account of the past may be helpful to students by serving as an “unofficial history” (Epstein & Shiller, 2005; VanSledright, 2010), but they have offered little guidance on practical ways of bringing these accounts into the classroom. The researchers suggest that students’ backgrounds are somehow examined as well since their identities and experiences serve as a filter for how they will engage with any accounts of history.

For Jasmine, Finn, Rihanna, Chris, and Tamara, studying their own families’ histories in the classroom served as an alternative account of the past with which they engaged and believed. They were able to encounter rich and conflicting versions of events that served as a catalyst for productive means of resistance to the grand narrative.

Overview of the Study

I used a qualitative case study design in order to examine middle school students’ experiences with official and unofficial versions of history in a social studies classroom. This study followed five students’ journeys through a family history project during the
last quarter of their eighth grade year. The following research question guided my work: How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history? The subsidiary questions included: What do students believe about official and unofficial history? What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families? What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented to them by their teachers and textbooks? How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?

Carroll Academy, an urban charter school, became the setting for my study. The school consists of 97% African American students who live in poverty. The Academy was taken over by the state at the end of the previous school year due to failing test scores of the students and was managed by a private company hired by the state at the time of the study. I met the participants in the Spring of 2012 and collected data during the last academic quarter of the school year.

As a result of the cross-case analysis, five major findings emerged: (a) the students were suspicious of the official historical story, particularly in the form of their textbook; (b) they shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the dishonest accounts in their textbook, and the rationales developed in similar ways throughout the course of the project; (c) although they had limited experience with unofficial history prior to the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources; (d) the experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction
between unofficial and official accounts in the classroom, and (e) students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative by the end of the study.

From these findings, I drew several conclusions. Researching family history in the classroom was a way to provide students an opportunity to engage with conflicting accounts of history. In the process of grappling with the contradictions, the students became more critical of the official version and developed a more productive means of resisting the grand narrative. They desired to create a new and personal version of history that was comprised of small narratives woven together and sourced from both official and unofficial accounts.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the conclusions and the implications for teachers in social studies classrooms today. As someone committed to critical research, I hope that my research will help teachers find practical ways to include missing voices in the history curriculum and engage more students, particularly students of color, in the study of history. Finally, I discuss my goal of establishing trustworthiness, the limitations of the study, and my suggestions for further research.

**Discussion of Findings**

Jasmine, Finn, Rihanna, Chris, and Tamara entered into the study with varied life experiences, historical knowledge, and strong opinions. They all believed that the official version of history they learn about in school is untrue and missing large parts of the story of America’s past. Their suspicions led them to resist the grand narrative either by disengaging from the curriculum or by trying to prove the content wrong in very specific cases. Once they began to study their families’ histories, they encountered
unofficial accounts of the past that conflicted with the official version they knew from school.

The students preferred using unofficial sources of history, but they eventually insisted upon corroborating with official sources as well to create a more complete picture of the past. I use the term “corroboration” in the way Wineburg (1991) used the term—as one of the common practices in which historians engage while “doing history.” The dissonance that was created from the conflicting accounts inspired them to engage in productive endeavors of resistance through research. In the following sections, I discuss the conclusions that might be drawn from these findings when they are considered in the context of the existing literature and of my research questions.

Official History

**Suspicions.** The students were, to varying degrees, suspicious of both the content of the grand narrative and the sources from which it derived. Because my participants were all primarily of African American descent, my findings confirm and extend the work of Terrie Epstein (1997, 1998; Epstein & Shiller, 2005). Epstein described a “double historical consciousness” (1997, p. 30) wherein African American students know the official grand narrative but retain a sort of unofficial history as well that comes from family and friends. In the same study, she described how the participants knew there was more to the story than what they learned in school and how they did not trust the credibility of the textbook as most White children do. As I detailed in the suspicion section of Chapter 4, the suspicions that my participants reported align with Epstein’s
findings. The students in my study ranked the credibility of historical sources in a similar
order as Epstein’s participants. They trust their families, not their textbooks.

This finding counters previous work published by Wade (1993), Wineburg
(1999), and VanSledright (2002) who described an encyclopedic epistemology whereby
textbooks are seen as holding truth. Students have been described as buying into the
“referential illusion” (Barthes, 1986) that transpires when individuals read textbooks.
This phenomenon occurs when content is recorded and published in a formal format; it
becomes codified as “truth” for many people. My finding contradicts this tenet. The
participants in my study were very clear from the beginning of the study about their
mistrust of history textbooks and the “lies” contained in them. VanSledright’s more
recent work (2010) acknowledged that a growing body of evidence exists regarding
students of color, who do not believe the textbook version of the grand narrative as White
students do. My research supports this more recent claim. The students of color in my
study, in VanSledright’s (2010) recent work, and in Epstein’s (1997, 1998; Epstein &
Shiller 2005) research, do not trust the content in textbooks. Therefore, the “referential
illusion” does not seem to apply to African American students.

Rationales. By the end of the study, the participants all stated that the
inaccuracies and omissions in the official account of history were intentional acts of
racism. The students said that their families’ experiences are not represented in official
history because those in power, including the government officials who wrote their
textbook and continue to dictate the content which their teacher must present, want to
oppress African Americans today. Tamara described this oppression as “mental slavery”
claim that African American students’ experiences are not represented in the grand narrative and that students believe this omission is used intentionally to marginalize African Americans. The finding also echoes the sentiments of Wertsch’s (1998) Estonian participants who believed that unofficial history is not just “left out” of the story but purposefully suppressed for political reasons. My study confirms the findings of previous literature regarding minorities’ feelings about official history.

Interestingly, though, my participants did not cite intentional racism as part of the rationale until after they engaged in their family history projects. In the beginning, they did suspect the discrepancy was related to issues of power and politics (just as the Estonians in Wertsch’s 1998 study), but they did not speak to race specifically until later in the study\(^5\). This would seem to counter Epstein’s (1997) claim that her students initially cited race as the main cause of suppression of African American history. However, her participants were high school students who were in a classroom that focused upon minority experiences in U.S. history, so their attention had already been drawn to the issue. I suggest that the change in my participants’ articulation of the guiding rationale for the motivations of the textbook authors was stimulated by the particular instances of contradictions they experienced when they studied their families’ histories. Perhaps the focus on minorities’ experiences presented by the teacher in Epstein’s study and the family stories in my study served a similar purpose as a catalyst

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\(^5\) The exception here is Jasmine who said that she did suspect racism in the beginning of the study but could not articulate it then. Regardless, her stated reason for the mistrust changed to explicit racism just as the other students’ reasons did.
for critical analysis of the official history. This conclusion is discussed in more detail in the contradictions section.

Unofficial History

Preferences. As discussed in Chapter 4, the students reported some exposure to unofficial history at home but almost no experience with unofficial history within the school setting. The two worlds of unofficial and official history seemed to remain distant from one another in the lives of the students. As I reviewed the literature, this appeared to be the case in most classrooms. However, there were two exceptions to the lack of overlap between the two versions in the research, creative teachers and committed families.

When teachers intentionally work to bring unofficial primary sources into the classroom, students are offered some exposure to the conflicts that inevitably occur when differing versions are presented to them (Barton, 2005; Epstein, 1997; VanSledright, 2010). For instance, the high school teacher in Epstein’s (1997) study designed her history course to highlight the experiences of minority groups throughout U.S. history. Those were the same students that reported the glaring suspicions regarding official history and described the motivations as racist. The findings in that particular study align with my first two findings in remarkable ways as I discussed in the first section. Perhaps the family history experience provided the same sort of conflicting evidence that Epstein’s teacher presented, which resulted in similar rationales from the students. Therefore, I suggest a caveat be added to the literature. I agree that African American students are generally suspicious of the official version of history; however, I am not
convinced that they would cite racism as the main cause of the dishonest accounts had they not experienced conflicting accounts firsthand. Students who grapple with conflicting official and unofficial accounts of history seem to develop a rationale involving racism. The actual process students experience during the contradictions is discussed in the contradictions section.

The other instance of unofficial and official history coming to together in the lives of students within the research involves Sioux Native American students (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). Although their finding was incidental to the purpose of their study, they reported that the families of the Sioux students taught an unofficial history at home about their families’ and their tribe’s experiences. They tried to help the students fit their familiar and cultural history into the larger grand narrative they were learning about in school. They allowed the curriculum to guide their children’s conceptual framework of history but wove a narrative of Native American history within the official version. The researchers did not discuss any sorts of conflict that arose from this interaction between official and unofficial history, but it does raise the question since these were likely contrasting accounts.

Generally, the two versions of history remain separate between home and school for most children unless a teacher or family member purposefully brings the two together. This separation results in a “double historical consciousness” (Epstein, 1997) wherein students know but do not believe the official school version of history (Wertsch, 1998). The two stories simply sit alongside one another within the minds of the students and seldom overlap.
When students are offered two versions of history, they tend to prefer and believe the unofficial accounts. This finding from my study confirms the results of Epstein’s work (1997, 1998, 2000) where she showed that African American students believe their families’ accounts of history. When Epstein (1998) conducted a task-oriented interview that was similar to my Source Sort Activity, her results were nearly identical to mine in regards to the sources African American students believed to be credible. Family members were consistently ranked as the most credible source of historical information in both of our studies. Interestingly, in her comparison work with White students, family members did not appear in the top three most credible sources, but instead the most credible source was cited as the textbook. This finding has implications for my future research that is described later in this chapter.

The last issue regarding my third finding involves what the students did, or at least, what they desired to do, with the conflicting versions of history they discovered. They unanimously and independently claimed that the most effective way for them to come to any sort of conclusion about what has happened in the past would be to use both primary and secondary sources from official and unofficial versions of history in a practice of corroboration. This desire was one of the most surprising outcomes from the study. After the students denounced official history as racist and untrue, I assumed they would push aside the official sources and focus upon the unofficial sources. This was not the case.

Wertsch (1998) claimed that individuals who interact with both official and unofficial versions of history have three choices. They may either (a) accept the official
version as true, (b) reject the official version as untrue, or (c) allow a “means conflict”
where two narratives can co-exist (p. 99). I anticipated that the students would choose
the second option after claiming the malicious and racist intent of the authors, but instead
they chose the third option, “means conflict.” They all allowed the narratives to co-exist,
but they were not passive and did not simply let the narratives sit alongside one another.
They began to actively engage with the sources by comparing and corroborating them to
create a new version that was acceptable to them. Due to the ending of the academic
year, I was not able to see how this process would have unfolded, but their intent to
create their own version was clearly articulated.

We are left to ask why the students did not throw out the official version. I offer
two possible suggestions. The first possibility is that they are so rooted in the dominant
paradigm that they cannot loosen themselves from the shackles of the official version.
Michael Apple (2000) would likely contend that official knowledge is so deeply
imbedded in our psyches that we cannot easily free ourselves from it even if conflicting
evidence proves it to be false. The fact that the students were not content with simply
adding their stories to the grand narrative makes this possibility less probable. If
anything, they wanted to add confirmation from official sources to the new versions of
unofficial history they were creating.

The second possibility is that they desire a more sophisticated and inclusive
version of history where they can exercise historical thinking skills such as corroboration.
This second idea is discussed in more detail in the final resistance section of this chapter
since I see the creation of a new version as a form of resistance. Although I cannot offer
a definitive answer, I would venture to say that both of these ideas play a role in the phenomenon.

**Contradictions.** The contradictions with which the students were forced to grapple revolved almost exclusively around race. The students questioned why their own ancestors’ stories of success as free Blacks in the south were not included in the textbook in any substantive way. This created a dissonance for them that seemed to lead them all to question the motivations of the textbook authors in a novel way. Although they had started the study with mistrust of the textbook and the teacher as puppets of the government, they did not cite racism as a central motivating factor. After they engaged with story after story of land-owning, literate Blacks in the South both before and after the Civil War, they eventually concluded that the authors of the textbooks must be racist since they omit a significant part of the American story. The contradictions in their own and their peers’ research seemed to serve as a catalyst for critical questioning of official history and seemed to spark a desire for further research. As Dewey (1930/1983) explained,

> Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving . . . conflict is a sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity. (p. 207)

The conflicts they experienced served as motivation for learning.

The most surprising result regarding this finding was the students’ ability to also turn their critical eye toward unofficial history through their own families’ accounts and documents. Although they universally trusted the motivations of their families, they
pointed to common problems in oral history, document recording, and other historical complications that occur in the recording of history. So, they neither threw out nor fully accepted either version of history; they insisted upon gathering and analyzing primary and secondary sources from both versions in a process of corroboration.

Since the students engaged in activities other than family history throughout the time of the study, including a textbook analysis with their teacher and debriefing through interviews with me, I cannot claim that family history was the sole catalyst of the developed rationale and historical thinking. I can say, however, that there seems to be a relationship between the sorts of activities in which they were engaging and a remarkably similar critical stance and awareness that developed by the end of the project.

It is not surprising that students were forced to sort through conflicting evidence during the study of their families’ histories. Olmedo (1997) suggested that most students are forced to grapple with sources that do not agree throughout the genealogical process. I would like to extend the claim, though, to include an explanation for why family history might be particularly fertile ground for this type of engagement with sources. First, students choose their own sources in family history. Barton (2005) argued that pre-selected sources are not nearly as educable for students as are sources that they find. Second, for most Americans, there is no other reference to which we can turn in order to compare our conclusions regarding our own families. We must learn to accept our best guesses in our reconstruction of our ancestors’ history because no other referent exists. One cannot fall back on official history to compare our conclusions to others’. The only way to create a version of our family’s history for most of us is to engage with the
available sources like an historian would. We can use official history as a context if we like, but there is no particularly strong force pushing against our individual stories. In contrast, when we work with students by providing them with conflicting documents around a famous event or person in official history, we ask students to learn a difficult process under the weight of official history’s enormous pressure.

For instance, when VanSledright (2002) led a group of fifth graders through an analysis of the Starving Time in colonial history, he was somewhat disappointed that they did not come away with more robust methods of historical thinking. He claimed that all the students grew with significant scaffolding from an excellent teacher but that there were no “breakthroughs” in their thinking (p. 136). I would suggest that if teachers started teaching historical thinking skills with more familiar and less formalized pieces of the American story through using the students’ own families, they may observe the occurrence of cognitive leaps. Once students become more comfortable and adept with the process of using historical thinking skills through the study of their families, they are then better armed for pushing against the pressure of events and people that are reified in the official version.

Family history is not the only way to engage students with conflicting sources, but I suggest that it is a particularly powerful way to lead students through developing critical and historical thinking skills for another reason. It engages our notions of race and identity. When Sleeter (2008) engaged in her own genealogical excavation, she explained:
This process can work as an entrée into historical memory about race, ethnicity, and identity—revealing the ways in which power and privilege have been constructed, the prices people have paid for that, and the ways in which ordinary people have changed inequities. (p. 115)

Family history, at least for African American students, naturally lends itself to meaningful source work and seems to result in critical reflection about race and power.

**Resistance.** The students in my study showed some resistance in the beginning of the project, although it was not particularly productive for them. They either disengaged from social studies in protest to the corruption of the grand narrative by the government, or they focused upon one event which they tried to disprove while ignoring the rest of history. By the end of the project, though, they developed a detailed rationale for the racist motivations they saw in their textbook and most of them responded to the bias with some level of indignation. I see their desire to create their own version of history from official and unofficial sources as a form of resistance. They did not merely insert their families’ experiences as a sidebar to official history, but they spoke of reconstructing the past through the corroboration of multiple sources and differing perspectives. They were never taught historical thinking skills per se, but they used strikingly similar ways of dealing with conflicting sources. As I explained in the resistance section of Chapter 4, the students described a system of checking and cross-checking multiple forms of sources from both official and unofficial history and comparing them to one another. My finding counters VanSledright’s (2010) claims. He spoke of a “cognitive helplessness” that occurs when students are faced with contradicting sources (p. 30). The students in my
study were not helpless. They spoke of and began to engage in creative forms of corroboration. Although they talked at length about what they wanted to do with the sources, due to the ending of the academic year, I was not able to witness them enacting much of the corroboration. I discuss this issue in the limitations section.

Existing literature has come to the conclusion that students’ resistance to the grand narrative is generally weak (VanSledright, 2010; Wertsch, 1998; Wertsch & O’Connor, 1994). Although African American students show greater resistance than White students, the forms of resistance used are not particularly robust or productive (Dimitriadis, 2000; Epstein, 1998). Several researchers (O’Connor, 1992; VanSledright, 2010; Wertsch, 1998) have suggested that students cannot resist the grand narrative because they have no alternative narrative.

So, why did the students in my study articulate well-reasoned and productive forms of resistance by the end of the project? I argue that the level of engagement they felt along with the practical experiences of contradictions that arose in the study of their families propelled them to a new level of critical thinking. Family history provided a piecemeal, yet alternative narrative, that allowed them to step out of official history long enough to view it from a more critical perspective. Some might argue that middle school students are not capable of this kind of historical thinking. The only existing published dissertation on the topic of family history claimed that eighth graders are not even capable of understanding or tracing their families back more than three generations (Hayes, 2002).
Since all of my students were able to debunk Hayes’ (2002) claim through their own experiences of tracing back into the 19th and even 18th centuries and since the data indicate that they were beginning to engage in corroboration between official and unofficial sources, I argue with the lens of Vygotsky (1978). Levstik and Barton (2001) claimed that we must define historical thinking in terms of a Vygotskyan notion of mediated action. Knowing is something one does rather than a neurological state that unfolds. So, rather than telling students how to learn history, we, instead, define historical thinking by watching what individuals do when they encounter the past. When we observe historians “doing” history, we see that “history is enacted, transmitted, resisted, and transformed” (Levstik & Barton, 2001, p. 121). We can then identify specific acts in which people engage when they interact with history. I would apply this same reasoning to the students in my study. They were able to develop a rationale and enact some level of corroboration because they had familiar and concrete situations in which to develop their skills. They were able to perform because they had to in order to make sense of the sources at hand about which they cared deeply. They rose to the occasion, so to speak, and in so doing, showed significant resistance to the grand narrative.

The kind of resistance the students showed was not only cognitively impressive, but it was also productive for the students. Chris and Jasmine showed forms of resistance in the beginning of the study that resulted in disengagement and failing social studies grades. They articulated that their lack of interest derived from their rejection of a mythical narrative in U.S. history. This sort of resistance is not uncommon for African
American students (Epstein, 2000), but it is also not helpful for them in terms of success in school. Even for students like Finn, Rihanna, and Tamara who tried to engage with specific events in history and who earned at least passing grades, the new form of resistance could be quite beneficial. They were accustomed to investing their energy into memorizing a version of history they did not believe. Not only did family history pique their interest in social studies, but it also helped them to develop skills in historical thinking to which they had previously not been exposed. All five of the students seemed to be instinctively teaching themselves how to engage in history through their sustained attention to sources for which they cared deeply. I cannot predict that all of the students’ grades will rise or that any of them will become historians; however, I can say that their interest in the content increased and that their attention was focused on creating a credible version of history through the corroboration of official and unofficial sources. The new form of resistance they described seems to be more productive for individual students as they engage with history.

**Research Questions**

In order to synthesize the conclusions, I address the research questions that led me into this journey. I provide Table 5 to show how the findings align with the subsidiary research questions. I added commentary to the findings in order to address some questions more fully since there is not a one-to-one correspondence between findings and questions.
My overarching question, “How do students experience official and unofficial history as they study family history?” was unpacked by addressing the four subsidiary questions.

Table 5

Findings Aligned to Research Questions

**Question 1: What do students believe about official and unofficial history?**

Finding one: Students were suspicious of the official historical story in the form of their textbook and teacher. (They were not suspicious of their families.)

Finding two: Students shared similar rationales for the perceived motivations behind the dishonest accounts, and the rationales changed in similar ways throughout the course of the project.

**Question 2: What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?**

Finding three: Although students had limited experience with unofficial history before the project, they preferred to use unofficial historical sources with the condition that one eventually corroborates accounts with official sources. (Family stories provided a catalyst for conflict between versions of history.)

**Question 3: What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented to them by their teachers and textbooks?**

Finding four: The experience of studying family histories created race-related instances of contradiction between unofficial and official accounts in the classroom. (They believed their families and created a new form of resistance using both versions.)

**Question 4: How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?**

Finding five: Students developed productive forms of resistance to the grand narrative by the end of the study (including a desire to create a new narrative through the corroboration of sources).

What do students believe about official and unofficial history? In the beginning of the study, the students believed that the official version of history, defined by the story presented to them by their textbook and teacher, did not offer an accurate or
inclusive portrayal of the past because authors and teachers are controlled by a corrupt government. By the end of the project, their rationale for the bias in official history changed to a description of a system that strives to oppress African Americans today. The students prefer learning about history from unofficial sources, mostly offered by their families, because there is no malicious intent, multiple perspectives are included, and many primary sources are available.

**What role does unofficial history play when a class studies their families?**

Since unofficial history is rarely brought into the classroom, family history served as a catalyst for conflict between official and unofficial history. It offered a multitude of self-chosen and conflicting sources which students were willing to spend extended time considering because they cared about the content.

**What happens if and when students’ conclusions regarding their family history contradict with the official version of history presented to them by their teachers and textbooks?** The family accounts of history were inherently more credible to the students than the official version but created dissonance in the classroom when they contradicted with the grand narrative. The unofficial version disrupted the grand narrative because the conflicts between the two versions were impossible to resolve in the context of official history. Rather than disregard the official narrative, though, the students chose to corroborate the sources until they were able to create their own version which was “true to me.” Since so many of the contradictions involved race, the experiences seemed to play a role in the development of the students’ new rationale
surrounding racism in official history. It allowed the students to become more critical of
not only official history, but also to question the reliability of unofficial sources.

**How do students show resistance to the grand narrative in U.S. history, if at all?**

Students showed resistance to the grand narrative from the beginning of the study,
although it was rather unproductive for them. Some students disengaged from the history
curriculum completely and others focused upon debunking particular episodes in history
while ignoring the rest. By the end of the study, students showed productive and
reasoned forms of resistance through critical and historical thinking and the
reconstruction of parts of the American story.

**Implications**

The experiences of Jasmine, Finn, Rihanna, Chris, and Tamara offer potential
implications for social studies teachers. By using family history projects in the
classroom, teachers can encourage greater engagement and investment from their
students, improve students’ critical and historical thinking skills, better understand the
backgrounds and historical knowledge that their particular students bring to the
classroom, and perhaps most importantly, provide a more inclusive social studies
curriculum. These implications are particularly poignant for teachers of African
American students, but may extend to all students.

Family history was an entrée for Jasmine and Chris into the history curriculum,
which they had previously rejected. For the others, it was a means of engaging in more
thoughtful and broader experiences with a history that they believed. The resistance
students showed to the grand narrative through the juxtaposition of their family stories
motivated them to consider official historical sources and gave them a reason to care about history. Since student engagement in social studies is typically very minimal (VanSledright, 2010), teachers may find family history a way to draw in unengaged students and to offer them some connection to the content.

Teachers who want to develop students’ critical and historical thinking may be able to do so through the use of family history. These processes do not simply unfold; students must engage in mediated action where they are able to work with concrete and contradicting sources for extended periods of time (Levstik & Barton, 2001). Due to the personal nature of the project, students’ interest levels are maintained and self-chosen primary sources are usually available in abundance. Family history creates fertile ground for the development of meaningful source work and historical thinking.

Thirdly, teachers who feel constrained by the standards and testing frenzy that currently dictate decisions in most school systems today can help their students enact a more inclusive and multi-cultural social studies curriculum. Within virtually any classroom in this country, students’ backgrounds contain a wealth of diversity, even if the students all look alike. Issues of ethnicity, race, gender, and class will inevitably arise and can be channeled into meaningful discussions of identity and diversity.

Finally, teachers can use family history as a way of getting to know their students, the families of their students, and the conceptions about history that students bring to the classroom. “Teachers who understand the perspectives that underlie students’ historical knowledge may be better equipped to support and broaden the historical knowledge that young people carry into the classroom” (Epstein & Shiller, 2005, p. 203). Students bring
experiences, opinions, and unique perspectives with them into the social studies classroom. If a teacher does not understand that background, it may be hard to build bridges between the students and the curriculum.

Ideally, teachers can guide students through the process of creating petits recits (Lyotard, 1979), or small narratives, woven together to create a new version of history that is authentic and meaningful to each student. If they fall short, teachers can still get to know students as they grapple with sources that do not fit into the official narrative and by so doing, engage them in the official story while building skills of critical and historical thinking. I offer a warning, however: This process is guaranteed to be messy and likely uncomfortable. As Gounari (2007) said:

> The lessons of history should be unsettling; memory should not be perceived a refuge, but rather as an open arena of struggle . . . Historical narratives should be detached from their safe and permanent character and should become a counter memory . . . that involves opposing views and ideas that are subject to critique and questioning. (p. 110)

Imagine a classroom where historical narratives can be detached and opposing views can be analyzed with a critical eye. Family history may be a practical, albeit messy way to create this type of environment in a classroom.

**Limitations**

Although I spent an academic quarter observing the students, it was not nearly enough time to witness the full development of historical thinking skills. Just as we were ending the year, the students were beginning to delve into deeper source work and
corroboration. They spoke eloquently about their intentions for utilizing the two versions of history in order to create their own story. However, little data existed regarding how they would actually enact this planned endeavor. If I had another quarter to watch them struggle with conflicting sources and write their own versions of events, the data would be much stronger and more detailed. Everything I saw indicated that this struggle, albeit messy, would continue, but I cannot say for sure since the project had to end unnaturally due to the time constraints of the school year. Ideally, the project, and thus the study, would have lasted an entire school year so students would have had time to enact their beliefs.

Future Research

Although the study offered tentative, yet adequate responses to the original research questions, it raised many additional questions. I consider future research for myself and others that can start where this study ends. The potential research involves: the diversity of students, a year-long experiment, and bringing official history home to families.

Family history research is a valuable tool for African Americans in the social studies classroom, but would the benefits be similar for children of other races? How would the results differ if a similar study was conducted in a classroom of all White students? Would the contradicting sources that seemed so critical to this study arise in a classroom of students descended mostly from Europe? Would these students see racism as a motivation of textbook authors? If the study was conducted in a diverse classroom,

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6 Sleeter’s (2008) family history work with White pre-service teachers could provide a foundation on which to build when I conduct research with White K-12 students.
would the White students use their African American peers’ families’ experiences to exemplify the bias in official history or would they find another reason for the bias that might include class, gender, or ethnicity? Family history needs to be systematically studied in a similar way in classrooms of varying racial demographics.

Secondly, the time limits of the project constrained the teacher and students from fully realizing the potential of family history. At the end of the study, Mrs. Swanson explained that she was going to use family history in the beginning of the following school year and attempt to weave the students’ stories together as a framework for the curriculum rather than depending solely upon the grand narrative (TI2, June 12, 2012). Unfortunately, as Mrs. Swanson was setting up her classroom for the following academic year, her principal came in to tell her she was laid off due to financial difficulties. I would be interested to see what would have happened or could happen if another teacher decided to try this experiment of a full-year family history project. This would enable me or another researcher to observe not just what students say they are going to do with sources, but what they actually enact in the classroom. I am curious to see the tapestry that could be woven out of individual family stories and the role official history might play in its creation. Would students individually create their own versions of history or might a whole class corroborate sources and stories to create a collective memory project? Would official history become the clothesline on which they hang the little narratives or would they create their own storyline that held the little narratives together? Is it possible to strive not for coherence but for a kaleidoscope view of U.S. history?
These are all questions that could be examined in light of a year-long family history project in a social studies classroom.

In this study, I considered what happens when unofficial history from home is brought into official history within the context of the classroom. I am wondering what might happen if the process was reversed. What would happen if a parent intentionally guided a student to bring official history home? In other words, if a family studied their own history at home, and they purposefully found instances where the official history learned at school contradicted with their findings from unofficial sources, what sense would their children make of it? Would they become more engaged with history at school as a result? Would they become more critical of both school and home versions of history or would it alienate them from official history? There is almost no existing literature on how unofficial history is crafted in U.S. homes, although we know home is the birthplace of most unofficial history (Wertsch, 1998). An interesting study might be to watch students within one classroom engage with willing parents in historical pursuits at home.

Endless possibilities exist for studies involving the interplay between official and unofficial history. Family history can play a potentially powerful and unique role in this complex discussion.

**Conclusions**

The dismal picture of U.S. History classrooms today demands that researchers and teachers find new ways of engaging students and encouraging them to think critically. Students have disengaged from the social studies curriculum for good reason,
and African American students in particular resist the official history in U.S. schools in which their ancestors are barely included.

Through the journey of family history research, Jasmine, Finn, Rihanna, Chris, and Tamara began to create their own versions of U.S. history. They developed a detailed and logical rationale that explained why their families were left out of the story and they resisted the omissions by resurrecting their own ancestors’ voices through their research. They grappled with conflicting sources and designed their own methods of historical research in order to reconstruct an account of history that is “true” to them. They opened the possibilities of creating a messy but inclusive collection of localized and personal narratives that could remain plural and competitive (Prickett, 2002). They did not insist on a cohesive narrative by discarding the official version of history because it did not fit into their families’ accounts. Instead, they allowed multiple versions to co-exist and asked difficult questions of both official and unofficial history. This practice echoes Sleeter’s (2008) advice:

It is important not to attempt to draw sweeping generalizations from any story, but rather to allow the stories to converse, and the disjunctures to sit alongside one another, generating questions for future consideration. (p. 122)

The students showed this mature ability to sit with the contradictions and to ask questions of all sources. In so doing, they created a productive form of resistance to the racism that is embedded in the U.S. narrative (VanSledright, 2010).

The students in the study were able to engage with official and unofficial history while becoming more critical of both and fostering the desire to use as many perspectives
as possible. Their successes inspire me to continue research in this arena. Students like Jasmine, who has her head on a table and a chip on her shoulder in the social studies classroom, are likely capable of a great deal when they hear the voices of their ancestors and when they are given a chance to bring their lives into the story of America.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS
Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Students

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Your child is being invited to participate in a voluntary research study. You will receive a copy of this document for your own records. The purpose of the study is to examine how students think and feel about official history (what we typically learn about in our textbooks and from our teachers) and unofficial history (what we believe really happened but is missing from the official record.) I will explore whether students studying their own family's history can bring unofficial history into the classroom and will find out how their ideas about official history change over time.

The students will be observed in their social studies class 3 times per week for the last quarter of the school year. They will be given an optional questionnaire about history to fill out at the beginning and end of the study. Some student volunteers will be asked to keep an optional log about how their family history project relates to what they’ve learned in social studies as well. Students’ work may be collected and reviewed for the study including: the historical and oral history reports which are being assigned as a regular part of the students’ school assignments. After writing down anonymous quotes from the work, the originals will be returned to the students. No actual student work will be used in presentations or publications in order to maintain confidentiality.

The social studies lessons may be audio-taped during this quarter. Some student volunteers will be given short interviews which will be audio-taped (for about 20 minutes) once every 2 weeks. The original audiotapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed and pseudonyms will be used in the written transcriptions. Identifying information will not be made available in the publications and/or presentations of the research data. Information obtained from your child will not contain identifying information about you or your child. The research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Your child’s confidentiality may not be maintained if there is an indication that if he/she may harm themselves or others.

I will be observing a regularly occurring classroom project. Your child’s participation in this study will help us to better understand how to incorporate students’ experiences and the experiences of minorities and women into the history curriculum in public schools. There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life. Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you and your child. Your child may choose not to participate or may discontinue their participation at any time without penalty and it will not affect their grades. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact me, Katie Knapp, at 216.401.2331 or Dr. Alicia Crowe at 330.672.2580. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.
I have read this consent form and I voluntarily agree to grant permission for my child to participate in the study described above including audio-taping. I allow information gathered from audiotapes, conversations, and/or work samples to be presented at professional conferences, educational settings, or published in professional journals, both online and in print. I understand that my child’s name will not be used.

Please check one:

_______ I GIVE permission
_______ I do not give permission

___________________________________  ________________________________  ___________
Parent’s Signature             Parent’s Printed Name            Date

___________________________________  ________________________________  ___________
Student’s Signature
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Teacher

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Exploring the relationship between family history projects and un/official history in the middle school classroom

Principal Investigator: Katie Knapp

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document for your own records.

Purpose: The purpose of my study is to examine how students think and feel about official history (that which we typically learn about in our textbooks and from our teachers) and unofficial history (that which we believe happened but is excluded from the official record.) I will explore whether students studying their own family's history can bring unofficial history into the classroom and will find out how their ideas about official history change over time.

Procedures
The students and teacher will be observed in their social studies class 2-3 times per week for the last quarter of the school year. You will be asked to keep an optional weekly log about how you think the family history project is going. You will be interviewed for about 45 minutes regarding your experiences with the students during this school year.

Audio Recording
The social studies lessons and interview will be audio-recorded so that the researcher can later transcribe the data. You are welcome to listen to the tapes during the actual study. Confidentiality will be maintained as explained below.
Benefits
This research will not benefit you directly. However, your participation in this study will help us to better understand how to incorporate students’ experiences and the experiences of minorities and women into the history curriculum in public schools.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life.

Privacy and Confidentiality
The original audiotapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed and pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions so confidentiality is maintained throughout the entire process. Identifying information will not be made available in the publications and/or presentations of the research data. Information obtained from you will not contain identifying information about you. Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies.

Compensation
You will not be compensated for your participation.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue participation in this study.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Katie Knapp at 216.401.2331 or Dr. Alicia Crowe at 330-672.2580. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study described above. I agree to the audio-taping of any lessons or conversations pertinent to the study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference. I
know I can withdraw from the study at any time. I also grant permission for information gathered from audiotapes, conversations, logs and/or work samples to be presented at professional conferences, educational settings, or published in professional journals, both online and in print. I understand that my name will not be used.

__________________________________________________________________________  
Teacher’s Signature                                           Date
APPENDIX C

AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER
Appendix C

Audiotape Consent Form for Teacher

“Exploring the relationship between family history projects and un/official history in the middle school classroom”

Katie Knapp, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

I agree to participate in audio-taped lessons about official and unofficial history as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Katie Knapp may audiotape the lessons at Carroll Academy.

______________________________________ ____________ _________________
Teacher’s Signature     Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____want to listen to the recording       _____do not need to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Katie Knapp may / may not (circle one) use the audiotapes of me. The original tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed for this study.

______________________________________ ____________ _________________
Teacher’s Signature                 Date

Address:
APPENDIX D

FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT LIST
Appendix D

Family History Project List

Throughout the family history project, you will be working on a portfolio and final presentation. You will not be graded on how far you get back in your research or how many relatives you find; instead, you will be graded on how well you conduct your research, how well you analyze your documents, and how well you connect your findings to a larger historical context. Here is a checklist of what will be included in your final portfolio:

- A completed **family tree** (as much as you were able to find)
- A **U.S. Map** showing migration patterns of your family with years
- An **oral history interview** form with a one-page summary
- A **comparison chart** of you and someone from another generation
- A **photograph** with an analysis guide and a paragraph describing what you learned about the photo
- A **census record** (or other document) with a paragraph describing the facts you learned from it
- A **5-10 final presentation** of the most interesting things you’ve learned about your family and how that information ties to US History
- A **historical report** connecting one or more of your ancestors to a famous event or time period in history
- A **letter of reflection** to Mrs. S. about what you’ve learned during this unit

*Each item is worth 10 points for a total of 90 possible points.*

*There will be due dates along the way for individual assignments.*

*The final project is due: __________*
Appendix E

Example Analytic Memo

Excerpt from Analytic Memo 2

4.23.2012

My role

OK, I’m definitely struggling with my role there. My instinct is to team-teach with Mrs. S. and she’s nervous so she wants me to. However, this is not action research. I am there to witness and record what is occurring, not to be a central figure. I must step back. I knew the first week was going to have a lot of team-teaching since I have experience in this and can help to motivate and organize the kids. However, I have red lights flashing telling me at this point to take a seat and record, record, record. I’ve told the teacher this and she understands. I can get much more involved in the first class since I’m there really just to help out. For the second class, I need to step back. It was hard for me to watch the teacher’s lesson with the comparison chart and the timeline because the kids were not engaged or on task. I was pretty good at staying out of it because I was helping kids on computer, but I need to do this and just record most of the time, even when I’m not helping kids.
Appendix F

Calendar of Lessons

### April 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
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<th>FRIDAY</th>
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<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 15
16 Northern and Southern States Lecture | 17 Introduction to Family History | 18 Goals & Project Requirements | 19 Compromises/Bleeding Kansas | 20 Computer Research Day & Oral History Questions | 21 |
| 22
| 29
30 Quiz |        |         |           |          |        |          |

### May 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 13
14 Lecture on Black Codes | 15 Lecture on Reconstruction | 16 Migration discussion with maps | 17 Lecture on Terror in South/Poverty | 18 Work day for students | 19 |
| 20
21 Lecture on Reconstruction | 22 Family History Project work day | 23 Family History Project work day | 24 Civil War Test | 25 Family History Project work day | 26 |
| 27
28 8th Grade Week | 29 Family History Presentations | 30 | 31 |        |        |          |
APPENDIX G

DATA LOG
Appendix G

Data Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts from Genealogy Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Groupwork Recording/Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes Write Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manifest Destiny Work Samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo Analysis Groupwork Recording/Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaire #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Chart Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Final Projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Interviews #1</td>
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<td>Student Interviews #2</td>
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<td>Student Interviews #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Logs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary of Students' Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Handouts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview #2</td>
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<td>Teacher Log</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Questionnaire #1

Student Questionnaire #1

Your name:

Your age:

Your race:

1. How do you feel about school? What is your favorite subject?

2. What is your Social Studies textbook mostly about? Who do they write about in your textbook?

3. Does your textbook always tell the truth? If not, what is not true?

4. What kinds of people do you usually learn about in Social Studies?

5. What is the most reliable, honest source of information about history? Who do you believe the most?

6. What is the most important topic or idea for kids to learn about in U.S. History? Why?

7. If you could summarize the story of American history in one or two sentences, what would you say?

8. How much do you know about your own family’s history? How interested would you be in studying your family history?
APPENDIX I

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
## Appendix I

### Organizational Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un/Official Question Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
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<td>Student Log</td>
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<td>Manifest Destiny Work Sample</td>
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<td>Artifacts from genealogy research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interests &amp; Info Chart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates mentioned in field notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX J

EXAMPLE SPREADSHEET
Appendix J

Example Spreadsheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>I1, 4.27</td>
<td>Lies travel? “I meant, like, um, sometimes my dad tells me different stories about the same stuff that the teachers tell me and they’re kinda different.” “So, like, the Christopher Columbus thing, and he told me about that and it’s much different than the textbook.” What kinds of stuff aren’t true? “Like that he came over here and discovered it, but when he got here, there was people here before him.” “So, that’s not discovering if there was somebody here before. So.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>I3, 5.22</td>
<td>Used example of Tamara as instance of a different story than you hear in your textbooks. “Um, Tamara. She said, um, one of her greats—I don’t remember but...” “um, he was a slave and went to the North and got rich and came back and bought his family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>I2, 5.9</td>
<td>“With exceptions for slavery, no, not really.” “it was very different” “Because they don’t want to talk about the good times of the African Americans because we are supposed to be the lower race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>I3, 5.22</td>
<td>Um, we all- we heard about how in World War- was it World War II when we had to save the world from Hitler, or something? *Q Yeah. *A Yeah, I mean, they tell about how they swept through all these concentration camps and saved them, but what my grandfather tells me is that they drafted people at a very young age, and with very little training. *Q Mhmm. Okay, so, your textbook tells a story of how America went and saved everybody, but your grandpa says that, um, it might not have been so great because they took young, American boys over there who didn’t have a lot of training, right? Okay. Um, what about the notion that all black were slaves in the South before the Civil War? Was that true in your family? *A No. I think that, that was also a lie because you know and Ms. S knows that I had a family of immigrants that came over and were never slaves. *Q Yeah. And they were living there before the Civil War in the South. What country were they from? *A They were from Afr- Uh, country? I’m not sure. *Q I think, we think they were Egyptian, which is in Africa, but it’s not the typical story, right? Of slavery. *A Right. *Q Um, why don’t they tell that story in, in your textbook? Because if it was you, then</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
there were other people too.
*A
Right. I think it’s because they want to make us seem like we are the lower race.
*Q
Okay. Why? Why would they, why would they just not tell the truth? Why- Who’s “they,” first of all? Is it the government?
*A
The government, people in general.
*Q
Okay. Why would they- And by “we” do you mean African American?
*A
Yeah.
*Q
Why would they want that? Why would they want to make African Americans seem lower?
*A
Because- I can’t explain it. Uh, can’t explain it.
*Q
What would be like a benefit of keeping African Americans down?
*A
Because we’re of a- Because us as African Americans are of a different nationality, the Caucasians-
*Q
Go ahead.
*A
- would like to, to benefit from that.

Rihanna I1, 4.24 “Christopher Columbus did not find America.” “You start to figure it out along the way.”

Rihanna I2, 5.8 All I hear about is the slave.
*Q
Yeah, why? Why don’t they talk about the successful things like that?
*A
I mean, probably because when they gave us freedom, they didn’t give us a whole bunch. I mean, they gave women the right to vote, but they didn’t give women the right to go places or anything like that. It’s, like, this time period where you could do stuff. So, being surprised that women back then can do stuff like we do, kinda surprising.

Tamara I3/Final project Haven’t noticed any textbook inaccuracies. Cited an assignment where a riot (Boston Massacre?) broke out…two totally different stories.

“Not all African Americans were slaves.”…because of own story. Assumed it was rare or maybe because of mental slavery. (Mentioned in final project work sample…learned not all A-A were slaves.)

Tamara I2, 5.8 “So far what I’ve learned, I don’t really know. But, in social studies, I didn’t really hear about African Americans owning slaves or having the money to buy their family.” (contradicted own family story)
Teacher  T12,  6.12

Um, what was their reaction when something from their research didn’t match up with the official history?

*A

Again, you got that **stunned silence**.

*Q

Can you give me examples? You said down on trial-in which, he had a lot of work but,

*A

Yeah, but I mean, he was just kinda, I don’t think he kinda knew what exactly, I don’t think he knew how to process. Because you’re told the story so much. You’re African American, hence, you have to be descended from slaves. **And that’s so engrained that they think that when that was presented to them it starts a conflict of identity.** You know? Of you know, can I really identify with this group I am forced to identify with my entire life? And you know (inaudible) in a lot of ways, struggles with that on his own.
Appendix K

Summary Sheet

Summary of Focus Students’ Responses to Select Questions on Questionnaire

What is your Social Studies textbook mostly about? Who do they write about in your textbook?
American History; Article of Confederation, Constitution, Wars, Land (T)
Mostly about Wars; 1600’s-1900’s (R)
American story and Wars; different people from history and wars, but “I really don’t pay attention to history books.” (J)
Mostly boring; “I don’t pay attention in Social Studies” (C)
“How should I know? She [teacher] doesn’t let us use the textbook” (F)

Does your textbook always tell the truth? If not, what is not true?
“I don’t think the textbook is 100% accurate but I haven’t really noticed any inaccuracies yet.” (T)
“My textbook does not allways tell the truth. It one time it said is was about the war between the british & French.” (R) -“Sometimes true Sometimes not” (Jefferson example) (R2)
“I really wouldn’t know because I don’t like Social Studies, so I would never know if its telling the truth.” (J)
“I’m not sure I don’t read it” (C)
“Probably not. But then again somethings the government are lies.” (F) -“No, everything” (F2)

What is the most reliable, honest source of information about history? Who do you believe the most?
Textbook and believes the law the most (T)
Internet – up to date and informational (R) -“More than told facts- like books and computers and family but not school books because they have to make it understandable for that age group”
“I don’t know its hard to believe anything because lies travel” (J)
Slaves and “I have a feelin one of my ancesters was a slave” (C)
I don’t know (F) -“People I know” (F2)

Did you learn anything about US History as you studied your family’s history? What?
“My family came to America around the time were Mexicans were known in America and were seen as a threat” (R2)
Referred to another student’s history about slavery (J2)
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


